



Stories of the Gold Star
Line by Mrs. L. T. Meade
& Robert Eustace

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**Stories of the Gold Star Line by Mrs. L. T Meade and Robert Eustace
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1. The Jeweled Cobra - December 1898
2. The Cypher with the Human Key - January 1899
3. The Rice-Paper Chart - February 1899
4. In the Jaw of the Dog - March 1899
5. The Yellow Flag - April 1899
6. The Sacred Chank - May 1899

STORIES OF THE GOLD STAR LINE.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.

Illustrated by ADOLF THIEDE.

No. I.—THE JEWELLED COBRA.

ON the afternoon of the 3rd of April, 1886, I, George Conway, purser of the *Morning Star*, passenger steamer of the Gold Star Line, was sitting on the verandah of the Great Oriental Hotel at Colombo. We were homeward bound from Singapore, and the *Morning Star* was lying at anchor about half a mile from the breakwater. She was to leave at six o'clock that evening.

The thermometer on the verandah registered 90°, and I stretched myself at full length on a low wicker chair. The only other European present was a handsome, sunburnt man of middle age dressed entirely in white drill. I put him down at once as a military officer, from the white line of the chin-strap on his cheek. I had been watching him casually for some time and could not help being struck by his manner. A curious, nervous restlessness seemed to pervade him, he kept changing from one seat to another, lighting his cigar and letting it go out, and looking up quickly if any of the servants happened to come suddenly out of the dining-room. There was a keen, alert look in his blue eyes, and a set, almost fierce, expression on his firm, sharply cut features. He glanced at me two or three times as if about to speak and finally got up and came across to me.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but I think you are an officer of the *Morning Star*?"

"I am," I replied; "I am the purser."

"Can you tell me the exact hour when she will sail?"

"At six o'clock," I answered; "are you going home by her?"

"Yes, and I shall go on board at once; I can't stand hanging about here."

He called to one of the white-robed servants to get his luggage, and in a few moments started off. I thought his manner somewhat extraordinary, but as several passengers came in at that moment, and all more or less claimed my attention, I had to postpone my curiosity for the present.

About an hour later we were all on board. I found the new passenger, whose name was entered in the ship's lists as Major Strangways, leaning over the railing. The anxious look was still on his face, and he watched each fresh arrival closely. At five minutes to six the whistle boomed out its

warning of departure, the Lascars were just beginning to haul up the gangway, when suddenly another shrill whistle, repeated thrice, sounded from the shore, and a small steam launch shot rapidly out from the Company's wharf and came tearing through the water towards us. When this happened



"Major Strangways, leaning over the railing."

I noticed that Major Strangways gave vent to an impatient exclamation, that he came and leant over the taffrail and looked eagerly out in the direction of the approaching launch. It came alongside, and a girl ran lightly up the gangway. As she did so I observed that the Major gave a sigh of distinct relief ; her luggage was hauled up after her, she waved her hand to someone on the launch. Immediately afterwards the quartermaster sang out, "All clear, sir," the engine bells rang, and the *Morning Star* swung round with her head once more to the open sea.

Meanwhile the girl stood silent, not far from Major Strangways ; her back was turned to us, her eager eyes were watching the shore. A steward came up and touched his cap—he asked what he was to do with her luggage. She replied quickly—

"My cabin is No. 75 ; have it taken there immediately." As she did so I saw her face. She was a distinctly handsome girl, with an upright figure and a proud bearing. She was well made and had a look of distinction about her. Her eyes had a ruddy light in them, and her hair was of that red shade which inclines to gold. The whole expression of her sparkling and youthful face was vivid and intelligent, and just for an instant as she spoke to the steward I observed that her lips parted in a brilliant smile. Her appearance, however, bore marks of haste. Her dress, a riding habit, was covered with dust, and her hair was in considerable disorder. The next moment, the steward leading the way, she disappeared down the companion, and I turned to attend to my numerous duties.

That evening, as I was dressing for dinner, the chief steward entered my cabin.

"I thought I would mention to you, sir, that as Mr. and Mrs. French have left, I have given the two vacant seats at your table to Miss Keele and Major Strangways."

"Miss Keele ?" I said interrogatively.

"Yes, sir ; the young lady who arrived just before the vessel started."

"Oh, that's all right," I answered.

The man withdrew and I continued my toilet. As I did so a smile of satisfaction lingered round my lips. Major Strangways had already roused my interest, and Miss Keele had the sort of face which must attract the attention of any man who has an eye for beauty. I am very fond of a pretty face and have seen many in the course of my numerous voyages. But there was something about the eyes and the whole expression of the girl who had come on board the *Morning*

Star so unexpectedly that afternoon, which worried as much as it attracted me. Had I, or had I not, seen that face before ? Either I had met it in the past, or it was startlingly like a face I knew. In vain I searched through my memory—the dinner bell rang, and I entered the saloon.

Miss Keele, with all signs of haste and travel removed, was seated at my right hand, and Major Strangways had the place next to her. I gave her a searching glance and, as I did so, almost uttered an exclamation. The missing link in my memory of the past was supplied. Good God ! what a queer thing life was ! That girl, sitting there in her evening dress, in all the freshness of her young beauty, had stood, three years ago, in the criminal dock of the Old Bailey. Beyond doubt, either she or her double had stood there. I knew now why the pose of the head and the flash in the red-brown eyes had so arrested my attention. It was perfectly true I had seen that face before. On a hot August afternoon, three years ago, I had strolled into the great criminal court at the Old Bailey and had there witnessed part of a trial. A girl had stood in the dock—this girl. I had never heard how the trial ended, nor whether the girl was guilty or not. There she had stood, and I had watched her. What in the name of all that was miraculous was she doing on board the *Morning Star* now ?

"I beg your pardon," I said suddenly.

Miss Keele had addressed me twice, but so lost was I in my musings that I had not heard her. I hastened now to push that ugly memory out of sight, and to rise to my immediate duties.

"I am afraid you had rather a rush to catch the boat," I said.

"Yes," she answered, with again that fleeting smile ; "it was a close shave, and was all owing to those abominable coolies. You cannot make a native understand that there is such a thing as time. I should have been terribly disappointed if I had lost my passage, as I am most anxious to get home by the first week of the Season."

"Then England is your home ?" I said tentatively.

"It is," she answered. "I spent all my early days in England, but I have been in Ceylon, on my father's plantation, for the last five or six years. I have an aunt in London who has promised to take me about, but I only got the final summons to join her at the eleventh hour. Hence my great haste," she continued ; "I all but lost the boat."

" You certainly did," I replied.

Her tone was perfectly frank, her eyes were wide open and unembarrassed. Could I be mistaken after all ? Was there another girl just like Miss Keele in the world ? But no, I was certain she was the same. There was a peculiar look and power about her face which raised it altogether out of the common, and I had never yet been mistaken in a likeness. The girl sitting by my side was a consummate actress ; beyond doubt she was acting a part.

" You speak, Miss Keele, as if you knew Ceylon very well," said Major Strangways ; " is your father's plantation anywhere near Kandy ? "

" Two miles outside Kandy," she replied.

all, it was not my affair. Perhaps she had been proved innocent, not guilty ; perhaps she was to be pitied, not censured. One thing, at least, was evident. Whatever she had done in her past life, she had now retrieved her position, her friends were respectable, and she herself appeared to be quite a lady.

I had just resolved to dismiss the matter from my mind, and was bringing my whole attention to bear upon long lists of accounts and invoices of stores, when, just as five bells struck, I heard a knock at my door, and to my surprise Major Strangways entered.

" I hope you will excuse me, purser," he said ; " I want to speak to you on a matter of some importance."



" I gave her a searching glance and almost uttered an exclamation."

" Then you surely know the Morrisons, of Gelpoor ? "

She laughed.

" I know them quite well ; do you ? "

" They are my cousins," he said. " How very curious ! "

The next moment the two were deep in a vivacious conversation, exchanging many reminiscences, and I saw that for the present I was out of the running.

When dinner was over I returned to my cabin. I sat down, lit my pipe, and endeavoured to review the position. The girl who had come on board the *Morning Star* at the last moment had, beyond doubt, a past which she was anxious to conceal. Of this I had not the faintest shadow of doubt ; but, after

" Certainly," I answered ; " sit down."

He seated himself on the sofa, and I pushed a cigar towards him.

" I suppose there is no chance of our being overheard ? " he said, glancing round.

" None whatever," I said ; " please go on."

" Well," he began, " I am in a very exceptional position, and I want to ask you before I say anything further if you will promise to keep what I am about to tell you an absolute secret from everyone on board ? "

" Certainly," I answered, " provided it is nothing which will compromise my position as a servant of the Company."

" It will not do so in the least. You will give me your promise ? "

" Yes," I said.

"Well, to begin, I must inform you at once that, as I sit here, I am worth close on half a million sterling."

I looked at him in surprise.

"I do not mean that I myself own that sum," he continued, "but that on my person I carry property to that value."

I waited for him to continue.

"I will tell you the whole story," he said. "I made up my mind to do so this afternoon. It is essential that I should have some trustworthy confidant, for one never



"Unbuttoning his shirt, opened it."

knows what may happen, and if anything should happen to me before I get home, I shall ask you to act for me. Would you mind locking your door?"

"Why?" I asked, looking him full in the face.

"To prevent anyone coming in suddenly. I have something to show you which no one else must see."

I leant over and shot the brass bolt forward, then turned to him again.

"What are you going to do?" I exclaimed, thinking he must be mad. "With great

rapidity he had taken off his dress coat, then his waistcoat, and, unbuttoning his shirt, opened it.

"Do you see this?" he cried.

"Yes," I answered, as he turned to the light; "what is it?"

He was wearing round his waist, next to his skin, a somewhat broad belt covered with wash-leather. As I spoke he suddenly drew away the outer covering and disclosed underneath a band fashioned to resemble a cobra.

"In this belt," he said, "there are jewels to the value I have mentioned. I am taking them home to England."

"You are doing a very dangerous thing," I could not help exclaiming. "Are you the owner of these valuables?"

He laughed.

"I?" he cried. "Certainly not. Have you ever heard of Prince Sindbia?"

"By name, of course," I replied.

"Well, these belong to him. His father has just died. He and I are very old friends. He is now the Maharajah of Besselmir. He is in London, and this day five weeks is to appear before the Queen at a State function at Buckingham Palace, in order to receive some special distinction. On that occasion he is obliged to wear his jewels, the regalia jewels of his state, and he has commissioned me to bring them to him, making it a stipulation that they shall never leave my person, day or night. It is, of course, a fearful responsibility. I dare-say you noticed how nervous I was on the verandah of the hotel this afternoon. Well, I had reason. A fortnight ago I received the jewels from the Maharajah's Palace at Besselmir—they were delivered up to me by the custodian, who had this belt specially made for my accommodation. I had important business to transact in Ceylon, and came across hoping to catch this very boat, and so to reach England in time. I did not suppose a soul knew of the strange wealth which I carried round my person, but yesterday I received a queer communication. A native of Besselmir had followed me from the Maharajah's palace. Last night he thrust a paper written in cipher into my hand. This was to inform me that a certain gang of thieves of world-wide reputation knew that I was coming home with the jewels and had resolved to deprive me of them. In what special way I was bringing them to England was still my own secret, but I was already the victim of a conspiracy, and it behoved me to be extra cautious.

"As soon as possible I got on board and

stood by the gangway, watching each passenger with intense interest. I was informed by one of the stewards that no fresh passengers, with the exception of myself, had come on board at Colombo, and my fears were just being laid to rest when the steam launch at the last moment shot through the water. I almost gave up hope just then. You can imagine my relief when I discovered that the new passenger was a woman, and not only a woman, but a girl I happen to know all about, for Miss Keele is connected with some of my oldest friends at Kandy."

"Let me look at the belt a little closer," I said. "Ah! what a very curious inner belt!"

It certainly was, being made of countless tiny links of solid gold to give it flexibility, something after the manner of Maltese work. Along its whole length lay a perfect galaxy of precious stones of all sorts and colours, many of which were unknown to me. The glittering blaze of gems was so dazzling that it almost took my breath away. Carbuncles of fiery scarlet lay side by side with amethysts, layers of diamonds, sapphires and pearls. The head of the snake was of exquisitely carved ivory, with an outspread hood of emeralds, and the eyes were two olive-green chrysoberyls that seemed to emit a marvellous opalescent light of their own.

"Well, you are in a strange position," I could not help exclaiming.

"I certainly am," he answered.

"Is it wise to carry the jewels about like that?" I said. "You had much better let me see the second officer and have them put in the bullion room."

"No, no," he cried petulantly; "certainly not. I will keep my promise to my friend, and you have just promised to keep yours. Believe me, the jewels are safe enough. Every extra person who knows of their existence only increases the risk. None of the gang who have threatened to deprive me of my treasure can possibly be on board, and I am safe enough until I reach England."

"All the same, I should not go ashore at any of the ports, if I were you," I said.

"Of course I sha'n't. The *Morning Star* holds me until we reach England, when I shall immediately take the jewels to the Maharajah."

"All the same, Major," I said, "it behoves you to be very careful to give your confidence to no one."

"Whom am I to give it to?" he asked,

looking me in the face. "I am not a man to make friends easily, and beyond yourself and, of course, Miss Keele, who is more or less an old friend already, I shall see little of my fellow-passengers."

I longed to say to him, "Beware of Miss Keele," but did not like to do so.

"Well, purser, I have your word to respect my confidence," he said; "you won't breathe a syllable of this to a single soul?"

"You have my word, Major Strangways."

He held out his hand and grasped mine with a firm grip.

I am pretty tough, and few things disturb my night's repose, but I will confess that on that special night my sleep was broken and restless. Major Strangways was in a strange position. He was carrying home on his person what amounted to half a million of money. A gang of thieves of world-wide reputation knew that he was the bearer of all this treasure. A girl had come on board at the very last minute whose face I had seen three years ago in the dock of the Old Bailey. How queer were these circumstances; and what did they mean? But for the fact of the girl's presence I should scarcely have been uneasy. I knew everyone else on board, but what about the girl? If I mentioned what I suspected about her, I should ruin her for ever. Such a statement would amount to slander. Without corroboration it must not be breathed. The girl might be wronged and innocent. On the other hand, she might be what I did not dare to think. Large gangs of thieves have employed women before now for their more delicate work. She was a handsome and most attractive girl—the prize was enormous.

I tossed from side to side, a queer sensation of coming trouble oppressing me. I wished heartily that Major Strangways had never taken me into his confidence. Towards morning I fell into a heavy doze.

The days sped by without anything special occurring, and, in spite of myself, my fears slumbered.

Meanwhile Major Strangways and Miss Keele became the centre of interest on board the *Morning Star*. There is nothing which gives such liveliness to a voyage home as an active flirtation, and we had not left Colombo many days before it was evident to every passenger on board that Major Strangways had lost his heart to the beautiful, bright-eyed, vivacious girl. He followed her about like a shadow, was seldom absent from her side, watched her every movement with burning eyes, was moody and silent when

away from her, and raised to the seventh heaven of bliss when in her presence.

Miss Keele, on the other hand, held herself somewhat aloof from the gallant fellow's attentions. She acted on every occasion as a dignified and reserved woman, never for an instant giving herself away or letting herself go.

When we reached Brindisi most of the passengers went on shore, and amongst them Miss Keele. Major Strangways, taking my advice, remained on board. He had said little or nothing to me about the treasure which he carried since that first evening, and I observed now that his mind was occupied with more personal matters. The bright eyes of a certain girl were of greater value to him than the most brilliant diamonds which had ever been excavated out of the depths of the earth.

No fresh passengers came on board at Brindisi, and, having coaled, we proceeded cheerily on our voyage.

At Gibraltar, however, we had quite an influx of fresh arrivals, and amongst them was a wiry looking, well set up young fellow of two or three and twenty. The moment Major Strangways saw him he uttered an exclamation of astonishment and pleasure, ran up to him, and wrung his hand.

"Why, Morrison," he said, "this is luck ! Who would expect to see you here ? I thought you were safe at Kandy."

"No wonder, Strangways," was the eager reply. "When last I saw you I had no more intention of coming to England than I had of flying, but I have been sent over by the quickest possible route on important business, was detained at Gibraltar with a nasty touch of jungle fever from which I have now quite recovered. My father will be much put about at the unavoidable delay, but there was no help for it."

Major Strangways eyed him all over with marked approval.

"I am glad you are better and that you are coming home with us," he said. "This is a curious thing, Morrison. I thought when I came on board the *Morning Star* that I should be amongst strangers, but first Miss Keele turns up, and then you. 'Pon my word, I'm right glad to see you."

"Miss Keele ? What Miss Keele ?" asked the young man.

"Annie Keele. You know her, of course. She has often talked to me about you."

"But this really is incredible," said Morrison. "I had not the slightest idea that either of the Keele girls meant to come

to England this year. I saw them both the night before I sailed. You must be joking, Strangways."

"Seeing is believing," said Major Strangways, turning round and for the first time noticing me. He introduced Mr. Morrison, who expressed pleasure at making my acquaintance.

"I'll just go down and find Miss Keele," said the Major after a pause.

"No, let me do that," I interrupted ; "you will like to show Mr. Morrison round, and the boat does not start for half an hour. I will find Miss Keele and tell her of your arrival."

"Be sure you say Dick Morrison is on board ; she will know all about me," called out our new passenger. "This is luck," I heard him add ; "Annie Keele is no end of fun."

"The most beautiful and charming girl I ever came across," was the Major's answer, and then they both sauntered away to the other end of the deck.

I ran down the companion. I found Miss Keele in the ladies' saloon. She was seated by a small table near one of the open portholes writing busily. She looked up as I approached. One of her idiosyncrasies was always to write her letters with red ink. She was a great correspondent, and at every port we stopped at she had always a heavy mail to despatch.

"Oh, purser," she exclaimed, "I am glad to see you ! I particularly want to have this letter posted before we start. It is for Colombo ; shall I be in time ?"

I noticed a slightly worn and anxious expression round her lips. I spoke abruptly.

"The vessel won't start for half an hour," I said ; "but I have news for you, Miss Keele."

"Indeed !" she answered.

"Yes, a special friend of yours has just come on board."

"A friend ?" she replied. She kept her composure admirably, but I noticed that in spite of every effort a queer, chalky hue was stealing round her lips.

"A friend of mine ?" she said again ; "but surely, Mr. Conway, you do not know any of my friends ?"

"I have only just made the acquaintance of this friend, but Major Strangways knows him well. I allude to Mr. Morrison—Dick Morrison, he calls himself."

"Dick Morrison ?" she exclaimed with a start ; "Dick ?"

"Yes, he has just come on board ; he is going to England with us. He is delighted

to hear that you are one of the passengers. He will be down in a moment to see you."

"Oh, I must not wait for that," she said, jumping up at once. "Dear old Dick, how more than pleased I shall be to welcome him! What a splendid piece of luck!"

She made a sudden lurch as she spoke against the little table, and the bottle of red ink was upset. It rolled down over the blotting paper, over the half-finished letter, and then streamed on to the floor.

"What mischief have I done? Oh, do send for one of the stewards to have it mopped up," she cried; "I must not wait another moment. I must see Dick without delay."

She left the saloon, walking very quickly; her colour was high and her eyes bright. I waited behind her for an instant to give directions about the spilt ink, and the next moment the sound of a loud crash fell on my ears. I rushed out. By some extraordinary accident, which was never explained, Miss Keele, when half way up the companion, had turned her ankle under her and fallen backwards, her head knocking violently against the polished wood of the floor. She lay at the bottom of the companion now, half insensible. The moment I touched her she opened her eyes.

"Oh, do, please, take me to my cabin at once," she pleaded.

There was a passion in her accents which aroused my sympathy. I helped to raise her—a stewardess came in view, we got further assistance, and the girl was taken to her cabin. Cairns, the ship's doctor, was hastily summoned. He came out after a brief examination to say that Miss Keele had hurt her head and twisted her ankle badly, and that she would have to remain perfectly quiet for the rest of the voyage.

"She must stay in her cabin to-day," said the doctor, addressing me. "Of course, she may be well enough to be carried on deck to-morrow. It is strange how her foot slipped, for the vessel was not even in motion."

I made no remark of any sort, but, going on deck, told Major Strangways and Mr. Morrison what had happened.

Major Strangways' dismay was very evident. Mr. Morrison expressed regret, and said he

hoped that Annie would pull herself together and allow him to see her on the next day.

"It is a great piece of luck, her coming over to England with us," I heard him say to the Major, and then the two men turned aside to pace up and down the hurricane deck.

Two days later we reached the neighbourhood of the Isle of Wight. Our voyage was nearly over, and people who had made friends on the voyage were looking forward, many of them with regret, to the inevitable parting on the morrow.

During these few days Miss Keele had remained in her cabin, sending out many



"Seated by a small table, writing busily."

excuses, both to the Major and Mr. Morrison, for her enforced imprisonment. The Major many times suggested that she should be carried on deck, but all his suggestions were negatived by the girl herself, who declared that she was in much pain and would prefer to remain in her cabin. Several of the ladies on board visited her, and their accounts of her cheerfulness, and the brave way in which she bore her too evident sufferings, aroused their admiration.

The last night approached. I had a great deal to do, and went down early to my cabin. I was just about to turn my attention to the ship's accounts when there came a brisk knock at my door, and Strangways entered.

"I thought I'd like to tell you myself, Conway," he exclaimed. "Congratulate me,

won't you? Miss Keele has just consented to be my wife."

"The dickens she has!" I could not help exclaiming, under my breath. "But how did you manage to have an interview with her?" I said, aloud.

"You know, where there's a will there's a way," was his laughing response. "I wrote her a note, and she consented to see me in the ladies' saloon when the rest of the passengers were at dinner. The stewardess

never was anyone like her in the world. I believe Morrison guesses the state of affairs. I must go and tell him."

"What about your belt, Major?" I said suddenly.

"Oh, that's all right. The fact is, I had almost forgotten it, but I have faithfully worn it day and night, and to-morrow, or next day at latest, will deliver it up to the Maharajah. It will be a relief to get rid of it."



"Still holding her arm, I went up to the unconscious man."

helped her to get into the saloon. Did you not notice my empty place this evening?"

"I can't say I did," I answered. "When a vessel like the *Morning Star* is reaching her destination, a purser has a good many other things to consider."

"Of course, old fellow. Well, the long and the short of it is that I have seen her, and she has promised to marry me. I ordered a bottle of champagne for the auspicious occasion, and we drank each other's healths. My God! what a lucky fellow I am! There

"You have not said anything about it to Miss Keele?" I asked.

"Well, no; is it likely? What gives you such a suspicious air, Conway?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing! Of course I congratulate you."

"You well may; I am the luckiest fellow on the face of God's earth."

His face beamed all over; he wrung my hand as if he would scarcely let it go, and left the cabin.

An hour passed, and I must say that during that time I paid very little attention

to the ship's accounts. Major Strangways' news had produced a sense of intense discomfort, and all my early suspicions were revived. Who was Miss Keele? What was she doing on board the *Morning Star*? Had she an ulterior motive behind those quiet manners and that beautiful face? Beyond doubt she had shown extreme agitation when I mentioned the fact that Morrison was on board. The spilt ink testified to this, also the changing colour on her expressive face, and, still more, the accident which occurred a moment later. Was it possible that the somewhat serious injury she received was not really accidental?

I started up when this idea came to me, blaming myself much for my suspicions, and then, making a violent effort, I withdrew my mind from Miss Keele and her affairs. Eight bells was close at hand, and I turned restlessly to the business which I must conclude before I lay down. I had just got a little bit into the swing of the thing when there came another knock at my door. I muttered angrily under my breath, but said the inevitable words, "Come in."

This time, much to my astonishment, Morrison appeared on the scene.

"Purser, I have something to say; I shall not keep you a moment."

"Come in and shut the door, won't you?" was my reply.

He entered gravely, closing the door behind him. His boyish face looked pale, and there was a startled, horrified expression in his eyes.

"You ought to know," he said, "and so ought Strangways. Strangways has just told me he is engaged to Annie Keele; but, by Jove! Annie Keele is not on board at all! I caught a glimpse of the girl who poses as Miss Keele. She came out of her cabin and limped in the direction of Strangways' cabin not ten minutes ago. I stepped back behind a curtain, meaning to spring out and declare myself, for Annie and I—the real Annie, I mean—have been the greatest chums all our lives. But, by Jove! it wasn't Annie at all; the girl was not even like her. What does this mean, purser?"

"God only knows," I answered. "Where did you say you saw Miss Keele?"

"Limping along the passage, not far from Strangways' cabin. She went very softly, and I lost sight of her almost in a moment. I was so stunned I could think of nothing but to come straight to you."

"You did quite right; and now leave me, like a good fellow; I must look into this matter immediately."

"But what will you do? What does it mean?"

"Heaven only knows what it means," I replied; "but leave me, Morrison, and at once—there is not a moment to lose. No, you cannot help—go, do go."

As I spoke my eyes lighted upon a pipe which Strangways in his excitement had left on my table. I instantly resolved to utilise it—it would give me an excuse to go to his cabin. Morrison had already departed. I now opened my own door softly and went out into the dark saloon, and made my way towards Strangways' cabin. I hurried my footsteps, and when I reached his door opened it without knocking.

Never till my dying day shall I forget the sight that there met my eyes. As it was past midnight the electric light was of course out, but by the light of a reading lamp on the wall I could see Strangways lying half dressed on the lower bunk. His face was white as death, his mouth slightly open, his eyes shut as if in heavy slumber. Was he dead or drugged? What in the world was the matter?

Before I had time to call his name, a rustling sound caused me to turn my eyes in the direction of the port-hole. A woman was leaning out of it. My God! she was the girl who had posed as Annie Keele. Without a moment's hesitation I rushed up to her, seized her arm, and said, "What is the meaning of this? What are you doing here? Speak at once."

"Let me go, Mr. Conway; I can explain everything," was her reply.

"What have you done with Strangways, and where is his belt?" I cried.

Still holding her arm, I went up to the unconscious man and bent over him. The belt, the wonderful golden cobra which contained the priceless regalia of the Maharajah of Besselmir, was gone. Where was it?

"You have robbed this man, and must account for it," I said. "I know all about the treasure which he carries; you are found out, Miss Keele—your game is up."

"No, it is not up," she said, drawing herself to her full height and by a sudden quick movement slipping away from my detaining hand. "It is not up, for I have succeeded. Do your worst; I care about nothing now. I said I would do it, and I have done it."

"But you have killed him," I cried; "you have given him poison!"

"No, not poison; I had to drug him, but he will recover after some hours. I liked

him too well to poison him. Do what you will with me, the belt is gone, and you will never see it again. I have fulfilled my mission ; you can lock me up if you wish."

Without a second's delay I pressed the electric bell. A moment or two later foot-steps were heard approaching. The doctor and chief steward were on the scene immediately. I blurted out what was necessary of my story ; the doctor bent over Strangways, and the steward took possession of Miss Keele. She was searched, but no sign of the jewels could we find. Her defiant eyes followed me wherever I went, there was a smile round her cold lips.

"I have succeeded," she said briefly ; "nothing else matters. I said I would do it, and I have done it."

A wild thought struck me. One of the ways in which smugglers evaded Customs in the old days flashed through my mind. A celebrated and successful trick was the following. The goods were placed in small metal cylinders, which were hermetically sealed. A line sufficiently long to allow the cylinder to reach the bottom of the sea was attached ; it was then pushed through the porthole and dropped into the water. At the other end of the line was a cork float to mark the spot. The cylinders were subsequently hauled up by small rowing boats from the shore, and the goods brought to land—thus the Customs were evaded. Was it possible that Miss Keele had disposed of the Maharajah's regalia in a similar manner ? If so, was I in time ?

I dashed my way roughly through the crowd and flew up the companion like a madman. I made straight for the bridge. Belphege, our first officer, was on watch.

"Man overboard !" I shouted ; "sling over a lifebelt."

Immediately something whirled over my head, and before it had struck the water Belphege had roared his orders to the quartermaster, who lowered one of the lifeboats.

"But who is it, Conway ?" he cried, as I felt the vessel shake and tremble as the engines reversed.

"Half a million, and I am going for it ; thanks for your smartness," was my answer, and I ran towards the davits and scrambled into the boat.

The whole ship was now awake, and the scene was one of indescribable confusion and uproar. The next moment we had shoved away and half a dozen Lascars were laying to the oars as if their lives depended on it. They were making straight for the lifebelt,

whose automatic light danced on the water half a mile astern.

"It is not a man at all," I said to the third officer, who was at the helm shivering in his pyjamas ; "it's half a million in jewels. Contraband goods trick—steer for the belt, I'll tell you everything afterwards."

"Great Scott ! what a game ! How did it happen ?" he cried.

"You'll see directly. Pull, you Johnnies."

"Atcha, sahib," the Lascars cried, and they bent to the oars, guided by the light that came nearer and nearer. We presently reached it

"Now, then, you men, keep your eyes open," I cried in frantic excitement. "Pull straight on in the line between the steamer and the belt, and look out for something floating."

I scrambled to the bows and looked right and left. In the darkness across the water a four-oared gig was making rapidly in our direction. Suddenly it paused, stopped, turned, and made as quickly for the shore. The appearance of the gig on the scene made my suspicions certainties. What a fiendish plot it was ! But now to find the floating buoy.

The officer at the helm steered in a straight line, and a few moments later I heard him utter a shout of triumph. There was something luminous bobbing up and down on the water. The next instant we were alongside it. The men ceased rowing and I leant over, seized the luminous object, and pulled it in. It was a soda-water bottle, evidently coated inside with luminous paint, and attached to it was a piece of cork. I immediately began to haul in the line that was fastened to the cork. Fathom after fathom came up, and at last at the end appeared what I knew was there—the wash-leather belt which contained the Maharajah's regalia. With trembling fingers I raised the flap of the belt and saw that the golden cobra with its wealth of jewels was safe within. After its short sojourn in the bed of the English Channel it lay uninjured in my grasp. My fellow officer and the Lascars stared open-eyed, as the galaxy of jewels flashed before their eyes.

I explained matters to them as shortly as I could, and we rowed back to the steamer. A crowd of chattering and excited passengers awaited our arrival. The skipper came up at once to question me.

"How is Strangways ?" was my first remark.

"Coming to," was his reply ; "but I never saw the doctor in a greater funk about anyone."



"Began to haul in the line that was fastened to the cork"

He thought at first that it was all over with the poor chap. The girl has disappeared, though. It is an awful thing."

"The girl? Miss Keele? What do you mean?"

"What I say. She leapt overboard. She managed to elude the steward, rushed up on deck, and was over before anyone could prevent her. We have been searching all round the ship while you were going after that half million. We cannot find her, high or low."

Nor did anyone ever find Miss Keele again, and whether she is alive now or dead is more than I can say. Her abrupt arrival on board the *Morning Star* was only equalled by her still more startling and sensational departure.

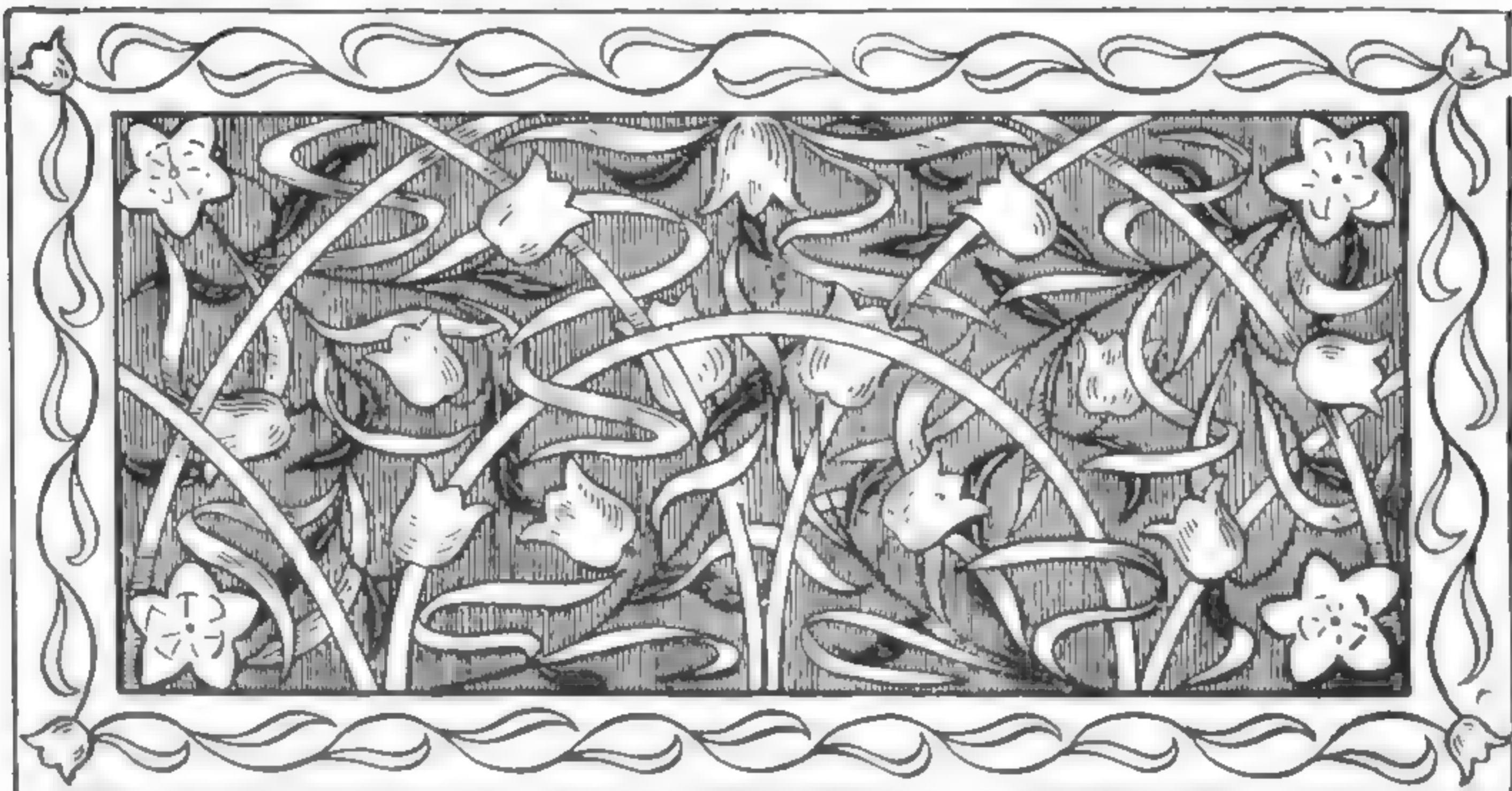
"When she heard that you had gone off in the lifeboat she seemed to lose her senses," said the chief steward to me. "Then he guesses," I heard her say. "If he guesses, he will find it, and then I shall have failed." The next moment she was off like a flash. Poor young lady," he added in a whisper.

I could not help echoing the sigh which

came up from the good fellow's throat. But Major Strangways was coming to, and I had to go to him. I told him my story. I found him almost delirious, and even the recovery of the regalia had little or no effect upon him. The fact is, Miss Keele stole far more than the Maharajah's regalia on that unhappy night. Major Strangways has never been the same man since; but at least the jewels were saved.

I went with Strangways a few days later, when he delivered up the belt which had so nearly cost him his life, and Strangways himself told the Maharajah the part I had played in its recovery. The great Oriental thanked me quietly, without demonstration of any kind. Finally he asked me my name and address.

Before I left England on my next voyage I received a neat packet. In it was a ring set with a single stone, a diamond of the first water. I dare not repeat the value which an expert put upon it. It remains when I am at sea in the National Safe Deposit in Chancery Lane—a reminiscence of how I saved the Maharajah's regalia.



STORIES OF THE GOLD STAR LINE.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE

Illustrated by ADOLF THIEDE.

No. II.—THE CYpher WITH THE HUMAN KEY.

THE details of the following story have been for many months a matter of history to every official on the Gold Star Line, but though circulated privately they have never been made public property before.

It was a cold, cheerless evening in the early part of May, 1897, that the *Morning Star* sailed from Sydney Harbour with both first and second saloons crowded to overflowing. The reason for this was the great Jubilee festival which was to be held in London in the following June. Colonial visitors from all parts of the Queen's dominions were flocking to it, and as I glanced round at the passengers I thought that I had never seen a more miscellaneous assortment. There were squatters and bushmen from up country in loud check suits and cabbage-tree hats, flash specimens of the Stock Exchange and racing fraternity, a few wealthy hotel keepers with their families, and a fair sprinkling of that marvellous and nondescript creature only seen to perfection on big liners—the professional globe-trotter. But of all the mixed collection, two men who came on board at the last moment most attracted my attention. They spoke English well, were dressed like gentlemen, declared themselves to be Englishmen who had lived for several years in the bush, had no trace of roughness or want of civilisation about them, but had

without exception the most sinister faces I ever saw in my life. They were strangely alike, too, in appearance—so much so that I would have put them down as brothers had not their names been entered in the ship's lists as George Wilson and Henry Sebright. They were first-class passengers, and never committed any solecism or made themselves disagreeable in any way whatsoever; nevertheless, I noticed that no girl liked to speak to them, and that even the men gave them more or less a cold shoulder. A history of crime seemed to be written on both their faces, on the thin lips and narrow, shifty eyes, and yet their features in themselves were good, and they had mellow, pleasant voices.

The ship was so full that I had much difficulty in making things go smoothly. This was partly accounted for by the fact that I had to reserve one whole state-room with three berths for a man who had booked them by wire through the manager of our office in Sydney. Such a request, however inconvenient, had to be carried out, and the passenger for whom so much accommodation was necessary was expected to arrive on board at Adelaide. I imagined that he must in consequence be a person of some importance, and in this conjecture events proved me to be right.

I happened to be standing near the gangway

as he came on board, leaning on the arm of a slim, pretty-looking girl, for whom, however, no special accommodation had been made. She was to occupy an upper berth in a four-berth cabin in company with other ladies, who were of course total strangers to her. One glance at her face showed me, however, that she was the sort of girl who would think very little of personal inconvenience, and that all her thoughts at present were centred on the man with whom she had come on board. There was sufficient likeness between the pair for me to guess that they were father and daughter. The man looked very ill. His face was of a livid grey colour, the cheeks were drawn and hollow, and the eyes glowing with hectic fever. I noticed that several pairs of eyes followed the new passenger and his pretty daughter as they slowly made their way across the deck towards the companion, and in the background I observed the two men whom I have already spoken about gazing at them with eager and intensely curious expressions on their evil faces.

We soon got under way again, and for the time I forgot the new passengers in a quantity of work that engaged all my thoughts.

A few days later, Cairns, our ship's doctor, came up and accosted me.

"I am very sorry about Rutherford," he said; "he will never see England, I fear."

"Do you mean our new passenger?" I inquired.

"Yes, I have examined him carefully. The poor chap has only got one lung, and that is going fast. His leaving shore as he has done is nothing short of madness. I told him so. He gave me a queer answer."

"What was that?" I inquired.

"He said, 'I know all about it, and I have my reasons, but I don't mean to die before the right moment comes.' He then told me that he has some oxygen cylinders in his cabin, and intends to keep himself going with these until we reach Suez. What in the world can it mean? Using such cylinders is of course against the rules, but the good old skipper will always stretch a point. As Rutherford was speaking to me his daughter came in. He calls her Elizabeth sometimes, and sometimes Betty. She is a fine girl, and you can see at a glance that she is tremendously fond of him. She is no fool with regard to his condition—I noticed that—but she was as cheerful in his presence as if he had not a pin's point the matter."

"It is a pity the man came on board," was my rejoinder after a moment's pause.

"I cannot understand it, for my part," reiterated Cairns in a thoughtful voice.

I looked him full in the face.

"What are you driving at?" I said at last; "do you suppose there is a mystery anywhere?"

"Oh, I don't know! I fancy somehow that my new patient has got something on his mind. The way he is burning himself up is really little short of madness. Of course he cannot last any time the way he goes on. From his way of speaking I think he is a



"Leaning on the arm of a pretty-looking girl."

medical man, too, and must know well what he is doing."

Cairns left me and I went on deck. There was a heavy sea running, and my morning's work being over, I sat by a skylight to smoke a cigar. Just before me the two Englishmen, Wilson and Sebright, were wrangling over a game of deck quoits at half-crown points. Presently I noticed the invalid, Mr. Rutherford, coming slowly on deck. With uncertain and feeble steps he came lurching in my direction, and presently sat down with a heavy sigh in an empty deck chair by my side. To my astonishment the moment he

did so the men stopped playing and came up and spoke to him. He replied in a friendly tone, and I saw at once that they were old acquaintances.

"I will bet two to one on you, Wilson," he cried.

"I will take you," laughed the other—"in sovereigns?"

"Certainly," answered the invalid, bowing his head slightly.

The men collected the quoits and began



"I saw him take her hand."

to play, showing a good deal of volatile excitement as they did so.

"You are a good sailor, Mr. Rutherford," I remarked, as the vessel lifted and swung down on the heavy trade swell.

"Oh, I am never sea-sick," was his slow reply; "consumptives never are, you know. I find the sea a marvellous pick-me-up."

"I am glad of that," I replied, "and I hope the voyage will do you good."

He did not answer, and just at that moment I saw Miss Rutherford coming on deck. She smiled when she saw her father, a bright smile full of tenderness and courage, and then to my great amazement paused opposite the two men.

"Ah! that was well done, Mr. Sebright," she said. "What an adept you are at the game!"

They both dropped their quoits and began to talk eagerly to her.

She chatted in the gayest fashion, laughing heartily many times, and then seemed to throw herself into their pastime with great zest.

"Father," she cried out suddenly, "Mr. Wilson has lost, so you must pay. He says you have taken him in sovereigns."

With a smile Mr. Rutherford put his hand into his pocket, drew out a couple of sovereigns and laid them in Sebright's palm.

"The wind is rather cold just here, my dear," he said, turning to his daughter; "will you help me to my cabin?"

She gave him her arm and they walked down the deck. A moment later Wilson and Sebright followed them. Presently, as I passed Rutherford's cabin, I saw the door open and Miss Rutherford and her father entertaining my sinister fellow-passengers with a bottle of wine.

"Now, what can this mean?" I said to myself. "Surely a girl of Miss Rutherford's type cannot really admire men of the Wilson and Sebright order?"

Nevertheless, I soon began to think myself in the wrong, for stately as her manners were and outwardly correct her bearing, Miss Betty—pretty Miss Betty, as nearly everyone on board had learned to call her—did give up a great deal of her time to the two men; in particular she seemed to single out Wilson for her most gracious attention. She paced the deck in the evening by his side, and once I saw him take her hand and hold it for nearly half a minute. I was standing not far off when this happened, and I noticed at the same instant that the girl turned white, that she bit her lips, and a look of pain so intense came into her face that tears absolutely started to her eyes.

She bore Wilson's handclasp, however, without the smallest show of unwillingness, and he never noticed the queer expression on her face.

From that moment I began to watch Miss Betty with great interest. That she did not

really like either of the men I was firmly convinced. Why, then, did she treat them, Wilson in particular, as if they were special friends ?

Mr. Rutherford got rapidly worse. I heard this from Cairns, who spent a good deal of his time in his cabin, and was on several occasions called up at night to attend to him.

"How is your patient?" I said to him a few days later.

"Why, Conway," was his reply, "you are the very man I want. As to my poor patient, he won't last much longer. I was just coming to find you; I want you to come with me to his cabin. He wishes us both to hear something he has got to say, so will you come now and hear what it is he wants?"

"By all means," I replied; "but what about Miss Betty?"

"I believe she is on deck, but he wishes her to be present, too."

"Then I will go up and fetch her," I answered. I ran up the companion and found the young girl standing near the taffrail, leaning slightly over it and looking down at the waves as we raced quickly over them. By her side stood the detestable Wilson. Since Miss Rutherford had bestowed so much notice upon him he had seemed to have gained in self-assurance and swagger. The easy, gentlemanly manners which had marked his conduct during his first few days on board now gave place to a sort of devil-may-care attitude. Sebright, however, was still gentle and subservient. At the present moment he was nowhere in sight, and Wilson stood far nearer to Miss Rutherford than I considered in good taste.

"I have been sent by your father to fetch you," I said.

"Is he worse?" she inquired. She looked round eagerly. Once again I noticed that queer pallor in her face, and the expression of unspoken anguish round her eyes, but the next moment it had vanished. She turned a bright, laughing face towards her companion.

"I must go now," she said, "but I will see you again after lunch. Good-bye."

She tripped down the companion, and I followed her. A moment later we found ourselves in the sick man's cabin. He was lying on one of the bunks, and as we came in he rose slowly and asked us to be seated.

"Betty, my dear," he said, turning to his daughter, "close and lock the door."

She did so; then she went and knelt by his side. Nothing could exceed the tenderness in her face. I noticed then its strength, the

strong contour of the chin, the curves of the firm lips.

"Are you quite sure you are strong enough to go into this matter to-day?" she said. Her voice sank to a whisper, but low as it was both Cairns and I heard it.

"Yes, my darling, I had better get it over; it will be a relief, Betty."

"Then that is all right," she said. "Please, gentlemen, come close up to my father; it hurts his chest to talk too loud. Now, then, father, dear."

The sick man glanced first at her and then at us, and began.

"I want to make a certain disclosure to you two gentlemen," he said; "my daughter is here to answer for its genuineness."

"But surely," I interrupted, "your own word is sufficient?"

"It would doubtless be quite sufficient if I could tell you all, but it is necessary for me to conceal the really important part. When the right time comes a full confidence will be made to you, but that time is not yet. Without knowing all, therefore, I want you both to make me an important promise. God only knows how tremendous an issue hangs on your compliance!"

Neither Cairns nor I said a word, but our eyes were fixed intently on the sick man's face. Miss Betty laid one of her slim hands on his arm.

"You will be brief, father," she said; "the gentlemen will, I know, understand matters quickly. You must be brief."

"I must tell what I have to tell in my own way," was the reply. "Now, then, sirs, I want to inform you both that, feeble and ill as I am, I am engaged on a mission of the utmost secrecy and importance. On me and on my daughter depends the exposure of one of the most diabolical conspiracies of the present day. There are many lives in imminent danger, and amongst them are some of the highest and noblest in England."

As he said the last words he lowered his voice and spoke very slowly, as if he were watching the effect of his communication upon us both. After a moment's pause he continued.

"My daughter and I alone can stop an appalling catastrophe, and we can only do this by your aid."

"You may depend upon my aid, for one," I said with sudden impulse.

Miss Rutherford raised her grey eyes and gave me a look of gratitude.

"I am the messenger of a private agency in Sydney," continued the sick man, "and

have been employed on this very matter for the last six months. As you, Dr. Cairns, are aware, I have only a few weeks at the longest to live. I shall never see England, but I know that by means of the oxygen which I keep in these cylinders I shall keep myself alive until we reach Suez. I wish to live until then—I equally wish to die then, for it is all-important that my body should be consigned to the Bitter Lake."

Here he paused, being interrupted by a violent fit of coughing. He had spoken quietly and seemed perfectly composed, but as he said the last words an irresistible con-

"What do you mean?" I cried.

Cairns now interrupted, his eyes sparkling with suppressed fire.

"I can assure you, Mr. Rutherford," he said, "that if it were really essential, it would be possible to convey your body to England on board the *Morning Star*; we could embalm—"

The invalid raised his hand with an irritable gesture.

"You must hear me out," he said. "There are two men on board involved in the great conspiracy to which I have just alluded."



"He drew out a strange oil silk case."

viction seized me that the man must be insane. I glanced at Cairns, but saw no reflection of my thought on his face; and as to Miss Rutherford, except for two burning spots which had appeared on her cheeks, she did not show any special emotion.

"When I reach the Bitter Lake I shall die," continued the invalid, speaking now almost cheerfully, and in a most matter-of-fact voice; "and," he continued, "as a necessary consequence my body will be buried there. Now, it is absolutely necessary for the success of my scheme that my body should be buried in the Bitter Lake, and it is equally necessary that it should reach England."

"What?" I cried, springing from my seat, "do you allude to Wilson and Sebright?"

"I would prefer not to name the persons," he answered. "They are on board, and it is necessary, absolutely necessary to the fulfilment of my scheme that they should both see my body committed to the deep. When this event has taken place their worst fears will be laid to rest, and"—here he glanced at his daughter—"Miss Rutherford will do the rest."

"I will not fail," she said; "I will act my part to the end."

"I know that well," was her father's reply. "Gentlemen," he added, glancing at

us both, "this girl has the spirit of a man in her veins ; she will neither falter nor swerve until the whole scheme which we have come on board to complete has been carried through to the bitter end."

Miss Betty drew herself up and her eyes flashed with fire.

Mr. Rutherford continued to speak.

"The men to whom I have alluded must see my body go to the bottom of the Lake loaded with twenty pounds of chain cable. Gentlemen, it will be your business to see that this is done."

"That would be done in the natural course," said Cairns slowly ; "but, my dear sir, the subject is a painful one—why dwell on it ?"

"I must do so, and I must also get your distinct promise, Dr. Cairns, and yours also, Mr. Conway, that you will both personally superintend the matter."

I bowed. Cairns did not speak.

"My body must be buried," continued the dying man, "but it must also rise again. I have made all the necessary arrangements to ensure this. It will be picked up by the British Agent at Suez in a steamboat which will follow the ship. Already I have advised him by cable that I am coming by this boat." He leant back, and I could see the muscles that showed on his face working spasmodically.

"And now," he said, "for my final instructions." He rose slowly, crossed the cabin, and kneeling before a large trunk, opened it. From this receptacle he drew out a strange oil silk case.

"You will place my body in this," he said, "lacing it tightly together after doing so. You will then sew my body in canvas in the usual way. This case consists of a double covering, containing an air-tight chamber between two layers which are now collapsed. At one end there is an aluminium case, one side of which is made of felt. This case contains seven pounds of calcium carbide. From the box a tube guarded by a valve communicates with the indiarubber chamber, and as soon as the water by its pressure has forced its way through the felt and reached this substance an enormous evolution of acetylene gas will take place and will inflate the whole covering. The specific gravity will be instantly lowered to such an extent that in less than twenty minutes my body will once again reach the surface. I organised this case myself long ago and have made frequent experiments in Sydney Harbour. You quite understand now, Dr. Cairns, what you are expected to do?"

Cairns stood up and began handling the case.

"This is the most ingenious device I ever heard of," he said. "You certainly astonish me. Yes, sir, I think you may rest assured that Conway and I will respect your half confidence, and will see this matter properly carried through."

"Then that is all right," said the sick man. "I have unburdened my mind and can rest. Let my burial be as public as possible ; let those—those men to whom I have alluded be present."

He sank back on his seat panting slightly.

"Please go away now," said Miss Rutherford ; "he cannot stand any more."

The red spots had faded from her cheeks, but the fire had not left her eyes.

"Whenever the time comes," I said, looking full at her, "you can rely upon me."

"Thank you," she replied.

Cairns and I left the cabin.

The voyage continued without anything special occurring, but Mr. Rutherford now never came on deck, and his daughter spent most of her time by his side. Whenever she was able to go on deck for a little air, she was always found in Wilson's company. She showed apparent pleasure when he approached, and I often heard her talk to him about her father's condition. I thought from Sebright's manner that he was not quite satisfied with the growing friendship between Miss Rutherford and his companion, but Wilson's face beamed with intense self-satisfaction. He dressed more loudly than he had done, and his swagger was more marked. He invariably wore a heavy gold chain, to which a massive locket, which contained a single brilliant in the centre, hung. This appendage gave the final touch to the man's true vulgarity. Once as I approached quite near I heard Sebright say to him—

"I wonder you wear that locket."

"Miss Rutherford admires it," was the strange reply. I could scarcely believe my ears.

On the 18th of June we passed out of the Red Sea, and I shall never forget the day-break on the morning that we steamed slowly up to Suez. I was on deck watching the sun rise when Cairns came quickly to my side. His face was very pale and grave.

"Come down quickly, Conway," he said ; "Rutherford is dying. He wishes to see you ; he cannot live half an hour."

I followed him at once. Upon the bunk in his state cabin lay the sick man. His

breath came and went between his blue lips with a horrible hissing sound. Miss Rutherford was standing just behind him. When he saw me he beckoned with his eyes for me to approach, and I bent over him.

"Here is a letter," he said; "give it to the British Agent when he comes on board, and remember what I have asked you and Dr. Cairns to do. Thanks for all your kindness. Good-bye."

"Rest assured that I will do everything in my power to carry out your instructions," I answered; and then glancing at Miss Betty I continued, "You may also depend on my doing what I can for the comfort of your daughter."

The ghost of a smile flitted across his face.

"I trust all will go well," he said, and then I left him.

I went on deck, where I found the British Agent, who had just come on board from the tender which was alongside. I immediately handed him Rutherford's letter. He read it in silence.

"I have made the necessary arrangements," he said after a long pause, and speaking slowly; "everything shall be done as arranged. Is he still alive?"

"Yes, but he is dying fast," I replied.

By this time the passengers began to come on deck, and as the mails were brought on board I noticed Dr. Cairns hurrying towards me.

"It is all over," he said quietly. "We will carry out his instructions as soon as possible."

Wilson happened to be standing close. He cast an anxious glance at us both, then he approached the doctor and whispered—

"Did I hear you say that Mr. Rutherford is dead?"

"Yes," replied Dr. Cairns; "the funeral will take place this morning as soon as we are under way again."

The faintest suspicion of a triumphant smile crept round the man's dark eyes, and I felt I could have struck him as I saw it.

An hour later Cairns and I found ourselves in poor Rutherford's cabin. He was lying in his last sleep; his hands were folded across his chest, and the smile of death lingered round his lips. His daughter was standing near; her eyes were perfectly dry and tearless, and the red spots were brighter than usual on her cheeks.

"I know you will both do what is necessary," she said in a hurried voice when we approached. "I will go to my own cabin until—until you call me."

She left

"That is about the bravest girl I ever met in my life," I said, turning to Cairns.

"Don't talk of it; we cannot discuss this matter," said Cairns in a choking voice. "God only knows if we are doing right, but follow out the poor fellow's directions we must."

Scarcely uttering a word we both then began to carry out the instructions which had been so carefully given to us. The dead man's body was laced into the mysterious case with its double covering, and then sewed up in canvas. We sent for the quartermaster and a couple of men, and had the poor fellow carried out to the main deck on a hatchway grating, a Union Jack spread over him. As we reached the deck I saw that we were now well out on the Bitter Lake and going at slow speed.

The news of Rutherford's death had caused some little comment, and several of the passengers collected in a knot round the body as Mr. Hitchcock, a clergyman who happened to be on board, read the service.

Amongst those who stood nearest to the dead man were Miss Rutherford and Wilson. She stood with her back slightly turned to Wilson, her eyes fixed upon the still form covered by the Union Jack. Not for a single instant did her queer stoicism forsake her. The service proceeded, and at the words, "We commit his body to the deep," the screw was stopped for a moment, the men raised the grating, and the body slid down into the still water and disappeared. All was over. As I turned away I glanced up. Looking down now with an almost fiendish smile on his face stood Sebright. I felt I could not bring myself to speak to him, and turned quickly aside. I looked out astern. In the distance I could see the British Agent's boat, which had been lying ready, come slowly puffing out from the landing-stage.

By this time we were again well under way and rapidly leaving the Bitter Lake behind us.

At dinner that evening I could not help noticing a change on Wilson's face. It had hitherto worn a look both of cunning and anxiety; now this had completely vanished. There was a calm expression of ease about his countenance which yet was not without a certain melancholy. I guessed that in some extraordinary way Rutherford's death had given him relief, but that his thoughts were also with Miss Rutherford, who possessed an immense attraction for him, and whose grief he could not help sympathising in.

Sebright, on the other hand, was in boisterous spirits.

Miss Rutherford did not leave her father's state-room for two or three days. On the morning of the third day, however, she came on deck again. She was dressed in deep mourning and her face was very white. I noticed, too, a strange, almost reckless kind of hardness about her mouth, which was more particularly manifest when Wilson appeared. What did she mean by allowing the attentions of that scoundrel?—for scoundrel I had little doubt he was. I felt almost inclined to remonstrate with her, for was she not, to a certain extent, now under my care?

Once I went up to her for the purpose, but the moment I alluded to Wilson she turned restlessly aside.

"I know that my whole conduct is incomprehensible to you, Mr. Conway," she said; "but you must have patience. By and by you will see the solution of what is now a puzzle. Please understand one thing: I shall never forget your kindness, nor that of Dr. Cairns."

Tears rose to her eyes, but they did not fall.

"I must beg of you not to be too sympathetic," she continued. "I have no time to mourn yet, and, above all things, I must not give way. My father has left the conclusion of this matter in my hands. I have every belief that I shall bring it to a successful issue, but I cannot quite tell yet. But before we reach Plymouth I shall know."

Wilson approached and said something to the girl in a low tone; she turned away with him immediately, and the next moment they were pacing up and down the deck. They remained together during the greater part of the morning, and I observed that at certain times the man talked very earnestly to Miss Rutherford. At lunch they entered the saloon side by side.

Soon afterwards, as I happened to be in my cabin, the two men slowly passed. They did not see me, and I heard Wilson say to Sebright, "Now that everything is safe, I mean to win that girl."

"Then let me tell you, Wilson," was Sebright's reply, "that your increasing intimacy with Miss Rutherford is by no means for the good of—" They passed on and I did not hear any more.

That same evening I noticed Sebright pacing about alone, and now and then casting glances of strong disapproval at the pair who were standing close together leaning over the taffrail of the further deck. Once I passed them slowly. As I did so I heard Miss Rutherford say—

"Call my sentiments what you will, I have a wish to obtain it."

"My God!" was the low smothered reply, "will nothing else content you?"

"Nothing else."

"If I yield, if I give it to you, will you—" I passed on, much wondering.

The next morning found us close to



"His swagger was more marked."

Plymouth. As we were approaching the harbour Miss Rutherford came up to me.

"How soon shall we arrive?" she asked.

"In about an hour," I answered.

"Then the time has come for me to give you my full confidence. Will you and Dr. Cairns come with me to my father's state-room?"

"Certainly," I answered.

I fetched the doctor, and we both hurried down the companion to the state-room. Miss Rutherford had gone on before; she was waiting for us. As soon as we had entered she placed herself between us and the door.

"I will not lock the door," she said, "but I must be very careful that no one opens it. Standing here I can guard it. Now, then, for the solution of the mystery."

I did not reply. Cairns looked at her with intense curiosity. She was standing very erect, and those crimson spots which always visited her cheeks under stress of emotion became again visible.

"Yes," she said, meeting both our eyes without flinching, "I wonder what you think of me. It is true I did employ every fascination I had to draw Mr. Wilson on, and I did it with my father's sanction. I wanted to obtain something from him, and there was no other way. I have got what I want"—here she thrust her hand into her pocket and drew out the locket which Wilson had worn at his watch chain, and which contained the single brilliant star.

"He gave you that?" I cried. "Surely, surely you are not engaged to him?"

She did not answer for a moment, then she said slowly—

"I have paid a heavy price for this locket. Because of it I have told many lies; I have done more—I have consented to marry him. Yes, I consented last night; but"—here she gave a low laugh, a laugh almost of horror—"our marriage can never come off. Circumstances forbid."

"Tell us all," said Cairns suddenly.

"I will do so, and you must try to follow me. The plot is an intricate one." She paused for a moment; the locket lay on the table, her slim long hand covered it. "The plot in which my father was engaged is connected with the exposure of one of the biggest anarchist gangs in Europe, and the object of all our operations, which must have seemed so extraordinary to you, has been to obtain a key to their cypher, and at the same time to make them think that we had not obtained it, in order to quiet their suspicions and get them to despatch a certain communication from Plymouth to London which, if we can intercept, will put the whole gang into our hands."

"What do you mean, Miss Rutherford?" I interrupted.

"You must hear me to the end," she said. "It is needless to say that any cypher which

such a gang would employ would be made with all their ingenuity, and be such that its key would be well nigh impossible to discover. Well, we have discovered it. Unlike any other cypher, this one has a human key."

"A what?" I cried.

"Yes," she repeated, "a human key. You know, perhaps, of the Bertillon system of identification of criminals so much used in Paris. On this principle by certain measurements one man out of fifty thousand can be identified, for it is well known that no two men have all the measurements of head and limbs alike. Now the cypher employed by this gang has been constructed on various measurements from the chief of the gang's body, such as the circumference of his skull and length of certain bones. These, in an order which I now hold, have been applied to a code and reveal the cypher as no other key can. It would take me too long to tell you how my father discovered this, but a few years ago he was thrown unexpectedly and by extraordinary circumstances into the company of the chief of the gang, and discovered by an accident that the principal measurements of his body and those of the chief correspond. This, as you will see, was a most important discovery. He mentioned the fact to the chief, who was then apparently his friend, and the gang knew well that my father's body holds the key to the cypher. Hence their fixed determination to kill him if possible and have him buried at sea. The two men, Wilson and Sebright, came on board for the express purpose of murdering my father, but they quickly saw that it was unnecessary to kill a dying man. Nature did the work for them. Well, he was, as you know, buried at sea, and Messrs. Wilson and Sebright saw his body committed to the deep. They therefore now consider themselves absolutely safe, but they little guess the sequel which by my father's ingenuity is about to take place."

"But one question," I interrupted. "Why should not the measurements of your father's body have been taken before burial?"

"Because it is only the chief of the secret police in Paris who knows exactly which they are; it is to him, therefore, that the body must go."

"But surely, as I suggested, we could have brought the body home?" cried Cairns.

"Had you done so our purpose would not have been effected," replied Miss Rutherford, "because the two men on board would not have had their minds relieved; they would not have thought, as they now think, that



"Saw his body committed to the deep."

the key to the cypher is safe for ever, and would not despatch the telegram, which I believe Mr. Wilson has already written, to London. As soon as the ship touches Plymouth he means to send off this telegram. If he does so all our plans will be foiled." She paused, then slowly raising the locket held it on her palm. "I happen to know, and my father also knew, that, written in a very ordinary and simple cypher within this locket is the order of the measurements of my father's body, which it is necessary to know in order to read the key. When I promised to marry him last night Mr. Wilson gave me the locket. It was the price I required. He thought himself safe, believing that my father was buried for ever. Now listen: this is what is about to take place. As soon as we get into Plymouth harbour, and the tender comes out to meet the vessel, two detectives will step on board armed with a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Wilson and Mr. Sebright. Without the necessary signal from me they will do nothing. Mr. Wilson will have on his person the telegram which he is about to despatch to London. He will immediately be arrested and the telegram retained. Now you see what I mean. You perceive what I have struggled for: it has been worth the effort, yes, worth the effort."

Her face turned red, and then paled away to the most ghastly pallor. I knew what she was thinking of. She had lured Wilson to his own destruction as only a woman

could. It was a desperate game, but she had not hesitated to play it. For a moment she stood before us absolutely silent, her eyes cast down, then she raised them.

"Don't judge me too harshly," she said; "any means are justifiable to obtain such an end. What is the blackening of one woman's character compared to the awful issues which would have followed the letting of those scoundrels free? My father and I devised the whole plan and worked it hand in hand

—aye, even though he is dead, we still work this matter hand in hand."

Tears for the first time since her father's death sprang to her eyes, she trembled, then covered her face with her hands.

Cairns looked at her with intense compassion, but we were both silent. For my part I was fitting the various complex pieces of this masterpiece of detection together. At last I spoke.

"Miss Rutherford, you are a wonderful woman. Few would have played the part you have



"Sebright tried to leap overboard."

played so bravely; but are you quite certain that that locket gives you the further clue you want?"

"Yes; all is now complete. In less than an hour you shall see the fruit of my father's labours and mine. Be near me, I beg of you both, when the tender comes alongside."

We both promised; she opened the door of the state-cabin and we went out.

We were now drawing in slowly towards the harbour, and the tender bringing the Channel pilot came up alongside. I noticed

that Wilson was standing watching it. He held in his hand a small roll of paper. Directly the gangway was down, Vernon, one of the harbour detectives, accompanied by another man, sprang on board. Vernon hurried towards us.

"Is there a Mr. Rutherford here?" he asked.

Before I could reply Miss Rutherford herself approached. I now noticed that she stood in such a position as to put the gangway between herself and Wilson. He was standing within a foot of her, his eyes devouring her face. She gave him a quick glance, then turned to the detective.

"Mr. Vernon," she said, "my father is dead, but you have your instructions. These are the gentlemen. Do your duty."

With a sweep of her hand she indicated Sebright and Wilson. The detective gave one of those faint smiles which showed a keen relish for the work on hand. He glanced at his confederate, who came up quickly. In an instant handcuffs were placed on the wrists of Wilson and Sebright, and Wilson's roll of paper was transferred with the deftness and quickness of legerdemain to Vernon's pocket.

"What is the meaning of this?" said Wilson, when he could find his voice. "Miss Rutherford, Miss Rutherford, are you mad? Why are we both subjected to this indignity? Loose me, sir, at once; you mistake us for some other men."

"Your names are in this warrant," replied Vernon, in the coolest of tones. "You are arrested on suspicion of conspiracy against the Government, and must come with me. The less you say, the better for yourselves."

"You have no case against us," said Wilson. He looked full into the detective's face.

The passengers had now come clustering round in the greatest excitement.

"Ask Miss Rutherford," was Vernon's unexpected response.

She drew back for an instant, then she went boldly forward.

"I played my part, and I have succeeded," she said. "When you gave me that locket, Mr. Wilson, you fitted the last link into a necessary chain of evidence against you. You are a clever man, but a woman's wits, joined to those of a dying man, have won the victory. You little thought when I allowed you to make love to me, that I was playing a part as deep, as daring, as desperate as your own. I have won and you have lost. The contents of that fatal telegram shall never

reach their destination. Mr. Vernon will see to that."

Here Wilson burst into a high, excited laugh. He glanced at Sebright, who muttered something. I caught the words - "fooled by a woman—I told you so."

"I do not know what you mean, Miss Rutherford," said Wilson; "you must have taken leave of your senses. As to you," he said, turning to the detective, "the telegram which you have wrested from my grasp is of no value whatever."

"You think that, because you believe that the key to the cypher is lost," continued Miss Rutherford, "but you are mistaken; the key is forthcoming. You know well that my father's body holds the key. The measurements of my father's body are the same measurements as those of the chief of your gang; you both know it, sirs. You believe that my father's body is now lying at the bottom of the Bitter Lake."

"We saw it buried; there is no doubt with regard to that," replied Sebright.

"Yes, but you did not see what took place afterwards. The sea has given up its dead; my father's body will be in England in three days from now."

Sebright's face turned very white.

"This is witchcraft," he cried. "Wilson, don't listen to a word the miserable girl says."

"And," continued Miss Rutherford, "the numbers of the measurements are contained in this locket. I know all. You have failed, we have won."

"Come, come," said Vernon, "time will prove whether the young lady is right or not; but I have no time to spare, you are both arrested and must come with me. The less you say, the better for your safety."

With a wild cry, as if suddenly roused to the peril of the situation, Sebright now made a lurch forward and tried to leap overboard, but Miss Rutherford herself interposed.

"Your game is up," she said, "go quietly. My father did not die in vain; it is useless to resist."

"Aye, the lady says the truth," echoed Vernon. "Come, no more struggling, please."

A moment later the two men were on board the tender.

On reaching London that afternoon we found the town ringing with the news of the capture of the entire gang of anarchists. Few knew, however, through what byways that capture had been effected.

STORIES OF THE GOLD STAR LINE.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.

Illustrated by ADOLF THIEDE.



IT was on the 30th of April, 1889, that I landed at Tilbury charged with an extraordinary mission. Six months previously I had been transferred from the *Morning Star* to her sister ship the *North Star*, which was then running on the same lines as the British India Fleet, and instead of returning home from Sydney by way of Adelaide and Albany, we went north, up the Queensland coast, past New Guinea, through Torres Straits to Batavia, and through the Straits of Sunda, past the remains of the volcanic island Krakatoa.

I was glad of the change and the opportunity of visiting new ports and seeing fresh places. At Thursday Island, our first place of call, I went ashore and made my way to the little hotel on the hill. Here amongst a number of traders at the bar I ran across an old friend, a Dutch skipper, one Hans Nausheim. I was glad to see him, and we sat down and entered into conversation. He told me that he was now the owner of a few pearling boats, and had done fairly well for himself. He had only returned to Thursday Island on the previous day from one of his expeditions.

"I am glad you happened to call, Mr. Conway," he said, "for I have something which I am anxious to show you. You can, I dare say, give me your opinion as to what I shall do with it." As he spoke he opened a leather pouch slung at his belt, and from one of the pockets drew out a dirty and crumpled piece of Chinese rice-paper, which he proceeded carefully to unfold and smooth out upon the table.

I looked at it with some curiosity.

"What is it?" I asked.

"It is evidently intended to be some sort of chart," he answered, "drawn apparently from memory of an island in the Banda Sea

No. III.—THE RICE-PAPER CHART.

south of New Guinea. Whoever did it must have had some rough idea of the island, and with that memory has made the best job he could, though his latitude and longitude are all wrong."

"But how did this thing come into your possession?" I asked.

"That is the curious part. It was found by one of my Kanakas on one of the small, uninhabited islands, and he brought it to me. He discovered it on the dead body of a Malay, wrapped in a piece of waterproof of European manufacture."

"And do you suppose it to be of any importance?" I asked.

"That is for you to decide," was his answer. "It is evidently the work of an Englishman, and there is just the ghost of a possibility that it means more than meets the eye. You see this small hole in the left corner of the chart; it has evidently been made intentionally, and at the back there is some writing in English. Most of the words have faded by exposure, but certain letters are plain enough. They have evidently been written with a pointed stick smeared with the juice of the papala tree. Here they are, you can read them for yourself. I don't know that you can make sense, but as far as they go they are plain enough."

I bent over the dirty and almost obliterated chart, and made out quite distinctly on its back the following letters:—

HEOBALD
NGTON
LONDON.

These letters were all written in large capitals, and below them were faint marks of a sentence which was now quite unintelligible.

"I have been puzzling over the thing for a day or two," continued my Dutch friend, "and I do believe there is something in it. The hole is probably meant to mark the island, for all the lines seem to point to this one spot. As doubtless you know, Mr. Conway, thousands of islands are scattered

over the Banda Sea. The chart is the work of an Englishman, beyond doubt, but who he is and where he is it is almost impossible to guess. Except the one word London nothing else is legible. What do you think of it?"

"It is interesting," I answered, "and the name which is partly obliterated doubtless stands for Theobald. No other letter but 'T' would fit on to that 'H' and make sense. It is just possible, Nausheim, that with the help of a London directory the unknown person for whom this chart is meant may be discovered. If you would care to trust it to me, I will take it with me and look through the directory when I reach London."

"Very well," he answered after a pause, "I will trust you to do this; but remember, Mr. Conway, I am a poor man. If anything should come of this chart—I mean, if it should prove of value—you will not forget me."

"I will give you my word on that," I replied, "and will promise to let you know at once if I find anything out. A letter addressed to you here, care of the post office, will be pretty certain to find its billet?"

"Yes, for I call here pretty often," he answered. "You can take the chart, Mr. Conway."

I carefully folded up the precious paper and thrust it into my pocket. A moment or two later I left the old skipper, and going on board the *North Star* locked the chart in my strong-box.

Our voyage was without adventure and we reached Tilbury in good time. On the very day of my arrival in London I called at the General Post Office, asked to be allowed to look at a directory, and began my search. Beyond doubt the first name on the half-obliterated chart was Theobald, and the second might refer to Islington, Kensington, Paddington, Newington, or Kennington. My first task was to discover how many Theobalds there were in these districts. I found fourteen in all, three of whom lived in Islington, three in Kensington, four in Paddington, two in Newington, and two in Kennington. I noted down the various addresses of these people and determined to start immediately on my round of investigation. The mystery of the chart began to interest me much, and as I had nothing special to do, I determined

not to leave a stone unturned to follow it up.

I began my search in Kennington, visiting all the people whose addresses I had taken, but without result. I then visited Paddington, Islington, and Newington, and in these places also my search was fruitless. No one evinced the slightest interest in my story; on the contrary, all seemed to resent my inquiries and look upon me with a certain amount of suspicion which they took but little pains to disguise, and nowhere could I get a clue to the identity of the maker of the



"I apologised for my intrusion."

chart. It was on the morning of the third day that I found myself in Kensington. I had only three addresses left; one of these was in the High Street and belonged to a man who kept a tobacconist's shop. I called on him first, with the usual result. There were now but two more, one in the direction of Hammersmith, and one in South Kensington. After a brief hesitation I decided to give the more aristocratic address the preference. I went down Wright's Lane, therefore, and soon found myself in that quarter of dismal squares and so-called gardens which constitute the mass of buildings in this part of London. The address which I had in view I will call, for the purpose of this story, Rosemary Gardens; and when I reached number fifteen, on the afternoon of

that day, I felt a sense of satisfaction at being so near the end of my quest. If the two last addresses turned out fruitless there was nothing further to be done.

As I mounted the steps which led to the large house in Rosemary Gardens I roughly estimated the rental to be about three hundred a year. The name of the owner I saw in my note-book was a Mr. Morris Theobald. A staid butler replied to my ring, and on my inquiring for his master ushered me without any comment into a well-furnished library. He then took my card and left me. A few moments later the door was opened and an elderly man with a muscular and well set-up figure entered the room. I apologised for my intrusion and immediately told him the object of my visit.

"I am looking for someone of your name," I said, "in order to throw light on a mystery." I then told him of the chart and asked him if he could help me. He was standing with his back to the light and I found it impossible to scrutinise his features. When I came to the end of my story he said in a quiet tone —

"Do you object to showing me the piece of paper to which you have referred?"

I immediately took the chart from my pocket-book and handed it to him. He scrutinised it closely for a long time in silence, then returned it to me.

"Pray take a seat, Mr. Conway," he said. "What you have told me is extraordinary, and may, of course, be only a curious coincidence, but I must confess that I am much interested in this matter. At what date did the man who gave you this scrap of paper say that he had found it?"

"In the early part of February," was my reply.

Mr. Theobald crossed the room, opened a large bookcase and took down an atlas.

"And how long," he continued, "do you suppose it had been in the possession of the dead Malay?"

"Not long," I answered, "for, from his appearance, the Kanaka who found the chart judged that the Malay was only dead a few days."

"I see that it has been much exposed to the weather," said Mr. Theobald.

"It has," I answered, "although it was covered by a piece of macintosh."

"This is a strange thing altogether," he murmured, "very strange. The more I think of it the less"—he hesitated—"the less I like it."

"What do you mean, sir?" I asked eagerly. "Is it possible that I have really come to the end of my search. Can you really throw light on this queer affair?"

"It is possible," he said. "See"—he laid his finger on the map as he spoke—"this mark on the chart must be somewhere north of the two little islands Teon and Nila."

"How in the world do you know?" I asked.

"It is only due to you, Mr. Conway, that I should tell you more. Remember, there may be nothing in it, and yet, on the other hand, there may be much. God only knows. It is strange, your coming here and singling me out. Sit down; these are the facts." Mr. Theobald motioned me to a chair and seated himself opposite. His face had grown white and all the urbanity of his former manner was now eclipsed by an overpowering anxiety.

"These are the facts," he repeated eagerly. "Last year, in May, a young friend of ours—poor boy, he was almost a son to me—Jack Raynor, left England for Australia. We are large shipbrokers in the City, Mr. Conway, and Raynor was a clerk in my firm. He went to Australia on special business for the firm. Just before his departure my daughter Sibyl, my only child, promised to become his wife, and it was arranged that the marriage should take place when he returned. I am a rich man, and meant to start the young pair comfortably in life. We heard from Raynor from time to time. In his last letter he said he was going for a cruise round the islands in a friend's yacht. And the very next news which reached us was from this man, Mr. Bessemer, saying that poor Raynor was dead—he had been washed overboard in a heavy gale and drowned. Immediately on arriving at Townsville, Bessemer had reported the death and made an affidavit before the magistrate there. I shall not soon forget my poor child's terrible trouble—indeed, we were both fearfully cut up. I do not think Sibyl will ever be the same again. Raynor was a particularly fine fellow—young, handsome, jolly, as good a man as ever breathed."

"But what about this Mr. Bessemer, who took him for the trip?" I asked.

"I have never met him, but he is a great friend of my junior partner, Mr. Cardew. Cardew is a very old friend of my family's. It was he who gave Raynor the introduction to Bessemer. Poor Cardew was terribly upset at the sequel, and we can scarcely get him to allude to the matter, as he says he

can never forgive himself for being the one who gave the fatal introduction. It is on Sibyl's account that he is so downcast, for he regards my little girl almost as if he were her second father. But now, Mr. Conway, the thing that has struck me is this. Could Raynor by any chance have kept afloat and reached one of the islands, where he is now a prisoner unable to get away? Can he by any means have made this chart, marking it as you see, and then got the Malay to try and take it to some place where it would be likely to be found? It is well known that the Malays are splendid swimmers, and this man might have been able to reach the island, whereas it would have been fatal for Raynor to attempt it. This, of course, I know is all wild conjecture; but the fact is, I shall never rest now till I get to the bottom of the matter."

"If that is the case, I am thankful that I called to see you," was my answer.

"I believe it was Providence who sent you here. We must go without delay into the whole thing. Good God! the boy may be alive, after all!" Here Mr. Theobald rose from his chair and began to pace to and fro with ill-suppressed excitement.

"Dare I tell Sibyl of this?" he continued, lowering his voice. Then he turned to me. "Fortunately, Mr. Conway, my friend Cardew is in town; I will wire to him at once and ask him to come here to meet you. Are you disengaged this evening?"

"Quite," I replied, catching some of his excitement in spite of myself.

"Then be here at eight-thirty, and I will get Cardew to meet you, and we will go carefully into the matter. It must be thrashed out to the bitter end."

When I arrived at Rosemary Gardens for the second time that day I was shown at once into the drawing-room. The room was brightly lighted and looked gay with flowers and many harmonious and softly blending colours. The moment he saw me Mr. Theobald came forward.

"I want to introduce you to my daughter," he said; "come this way." He led me to the other end of the room.

"Sibyl," he said, "this is Mr. Conway, of whom I have been speaking."

A slender and graceful young girl came forward. She was dressed in something soft and white, her eyes were dark, and her whole appearance was extremely delicate and ethereal. Her features were cut almost with the clearness of a cameo, and I saw at a

glance that if health and happiness were hers she would be very beautiful. As she glanced at me now her lips trembled and her eyes swam in tears.

"You don't know what you have done for me," she said eagerly; "you have given me back hope. Father says you know something about Jack. Come and let us talk things over."

She led me to a small sofa, seated herself, and invited me to take a place by her side.

"Now tell me, tell me everything," she cried.

"But, my dear young lady, I have very



"The 'N' in that letter is a facsimile of the 'N' on the back of the chart."

little to tell. That chart may or may not have been Raynor's work."

"Oh, I am certain it is," she answered. "I have often dreamt that he was alive, and now this chart proves my dreams to be true. But here comes Mr. Cardew; you must be introduced to him." She stood up as a squarely built, dark man of about five-and-thirty years of age approached us.

"I have been telling Mr. Cardew about your splendid news, Mr. Conway," she continued, "and he is almost as glad as I am."

"If there is any truth in the news which

you have brought, Mr. Conway, I am much pleased," said Cardew. He spoke in a gentle, somewhat drawling voice, and his eyes, which were of a light brown, were partly narrowed as he watched me. The next instant I saw him glance at Miss Theobald. As he did so a curious light leaped into his eyes, passing the next instant; but the moment I saw it I guessed his secret. Had no one else suspected it? Was it possible that his love, his desperate love for the beautiful girl by my side, had never been suspected either by her father or herself?

"Yes, Mr. Conway," said our host, who

who kept better control over his emotions. He stood perfectly erect, with his hands behind his back, his thin lips pressed together. To an ordinary observer he was a clever-looking and interesting man, with nothing in the least sinister about him; nevertheless, that flash in his eyes when he glanced at Sibyl Theobald had betrayed him to me. I felt sure that all the facts of Raynor's mysterious death were not known to either Sibyl or her father.

"Well, and what do you think of it, Cardew?" said our host, when I had finished speaking.



"If you will help me, I will make it worth--"

now also appeared on the scene, "I have broken through my resolve and told my daughter, and also my good friend Cardew, all that occurred this afternoon. The fact is, the matter is too serious to attempt any reserve. Perhaps you will now kindly show Mr. Cardew the chart, and let us hear the whole story over again from your lips."

I removed the chart from my pocket-book and repeated the story that I had told Mr. Theobald earlier in the day. As I was speaking I observed that Cardew glanced now and then at the chart as if he would devour it. But for the queer, restless light in his eyes, I never saw anyone

He did not answer for a moment, then he slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"I think nothing of it," he said, and he uttered the words slowly and with a regretful accent. "Remember," he continued, "I have got Bessemer's letter, in which he says distinctly, 'Poor Jack Raynor was washed overboard in a gale of wind at least ten miles from any land.' You must, therefore, judge for yourselves that it is out of the question that this piece of paper can have anything to do with him."

"How can you possibly say so, Mr. Cardew?" cried the girl. "How do they know that they were ten miles from any land,

with all those islands round them ? Look at the letters on the back of the chart. The first word can only mean Theobald. Mr. Conway has looked up all the other Theobalds in London with the exception, I believe, of one family. Jack was lost in the Banda Sea, where this chart was found. Besides," she added, the colour rushing into her cheeks and then fading away, leaving them deadly white, "there is something which I recognised in the handwriting."

"Oh, come, my darling," said her father, "your hope is too rosy ; these are merely printed letters."

"All the same, they were written by Jack," she answered, "I know it well ; he always wrote his 'N's' in that peculiar way, always, even in his ordinary handwriting, printing them. I will show you what I mean, I will fetch some of his letters."

She ran out of the room, returning presently with a small packet tied together with a piece of black ribbon. Her fingers shook so much that she could scarcely untie the knot. Presently she opened a letter and pointed in triumph to the very obvious fact that in each case Raynor printed his 'N.'

"There," she said, "the 'N' in that letter is a facsimile of the 'N' on the back of the chart. Any expert, I am sure, would tell you that they were written by the same hand. Oh, yes, the chart was made by him, and he is alive. We must go and search for ourselves ; you will take me, father, won't you ?"

Cardew glanced at Mr. Theobald and then looked at Sibyl.

"Ask father to take me," said the girl, turning to him and laying her hand on his arm ; "you can persuade him —do. He will consent if you ask him."

"I would gladly ask your father to do so if it were the least use, Sibyl," was Cardew's reply ; "but as things stand, and knowing what I do, it would be a mere waste of time and money."

"Money !" retorted the girl, "what does money matter ; and if it took ten years it would be time well spent. I bore the trouble as best I could while there was no hope, but now I shall not know a moment's rest until this thing is cleared up."

"Everything possible shall be done, Sibyl," said her father ; "but it is scarcely necessary that we should go ourselves ; we can employ men to search the islands with the aid of the chart."

"No, no," she cried ; "we must go ourselves—you and I, father—and at once."

I turned to Mr. Theobald.

"You fully understand my position, sir," I said. "I in no way guarantee the genuineness of the chart ; I know nothing about it except what the Dutch skipper has told me. Anything you do is entirely on your own responsibility."

"I quite understand, Mr. Conway ; but, as things are, there is no reason why my daughter and I should not take this trip ; it will set our minds at rest. If Sibyl wishes it so earnestly, I am quite willing to undertake the affair."

"Then, in that case," I answered, "if you really desire to go, you could not do better than come with me in the *North Star*—at any rate, as far as Batavia. After that you can make what arrangements you like for the search. We shall sail from London on the 17th."

"Let us decide to do it," cried the girl. "Oh, it would be splendid !"

"Very well ; I will go carefully into the matter," said her father, "and to-morrow morning will consult Ferrers, our business man. In the meantime, Mr. Conway, please accept my sincere thanks for all the trouble you have taken."

Soon afterwards I took my leave, Cardew accompanying me.

"I am going to my club," he said suddenly. "If you have nothing better to do, will you come with me ? This is an extraordinary affair, and I should like to talk it over with you."

"I will come, with pleasure," I replied. We called a hansom, got into it, and drove to the club. When we got there Cardew ordered supper, and over the meal proceeded to discuss the situation.

"I will be quite frank with you, Mr. Conway," he said. "I do not approve of this wild-goose chase. The chart, as far as Raynor is concerned, is worthless."

I interrupted him.

"One thing, at least, is clear," I said. "It is the work of an Englishman, and the words on the back allude to a person of the name of Theobald."

"That may be the case ; but they do not allude to Mr. Theobald of Rosemary Gardens."

"They allude to someone of the name of Theobald who lives in Kensington, Paddington, Islington, Kennington, or Newington," I answered. "I have seen, with one exception, the Theobalds in those five quarters ; your Mr. Theobald is the only one who takes the least interest in the matter."

He drummed impatiently with his hand on the table.

"Let me look at the thing once more," he said.

I unfolded the chart, and, stretching across the table, held my hand partly on it as he examined it. He did so very gravely, then pushed it back to me.

"I would give a good deal that they did not go," he said.

"Why?" I asked suddenly.

He shot an eager glance at me, then looked round him. There was no one near.

"I will tell you a secret which I have never before confided to living man," he replied. "Before God I fully believe that Raynor is dead. The evidence of his death is too absolutely complete for any sensible person to attach the least importance to that piece of paper. Sibyl has very strong feelings; she was nearly mad with grief when he died. That grief has now quieted down, and she was just beginning to accept the inevitable. Your appearance on the scene has revived her old sensations and given her hope - false hope. Yes, before God," he added, speaking with great bitterness, "the hope is false - false as hell! and, sir, it interferes with me - with me!"

"With you?" I said.

"With me; for I love her to madness. I have loved her for years. That boy, who had not yet cut his wisdom teeth, came in my way. I had not spoken, I had not dared to, but he stepped in and won her. God, what I suffered! But I kept my emotions to myself, and no one guessed. Mr. Theobald knows nothing of this, nor does Sibyl. The lad went away and — died. I shall win her yet, but this trip interferes with me. Do you understand?"

I bowed without making any answer. He stared fixedly at me as if he would read me through; then, bending across the table and laying his hand within an inch of mine, he continued —

"Mr. Conway, I would do much, much to prevent Sibyl starting on this voyage. If you will help me, I will make it worth —"

I started back.

"I cannot interfere," I said. "I have stated my case; I have shown the chart to the Theobalds; it is for them to decide."

"Say no more," he answered. "It was in your power to do a great deal and I am rich and powerful, and could have —" He broke off abruptly his face was the colour of chalk. "I see it is useless to ask you," he said finally.

"It is," I replied. "In a place like the Banda Sea, which is full of islands, there is a possibility of Mr. Raynor being alive. The more Mr. Theobald thinks over this matter, the more anxious he will be to follow up this possibility. I am sorry for you, Mr. Cardew, and I will, of course, respect your confidence; but beyond remaining neutral in the matter I can do nothing."

"I understand," he said. He remained silent for a moment, evidently in deep thought; then he turned the conversation to indifferent matters.

During the next few days I was in constant communication with the Theobalds, and was often at their house. By my advice Theobald consulted an expert on the value of the chart. This man, on carefully examining it, pronounced it useless unless the explorer already knew something of the position of the island; but, on the other hand, if such a person could be found, the chart might lead to the right island.

The moment I heard this I suggested that we should cable to the Dutchman, who knew all those waters well. This was eagerly agreed to by Mr. Theobald, and accordingly I cabled to Nausheim to meet us at Batavia, telling him that we would be there by a certain date.

Miss Theobald and her father then made eager and hurried preparations for the voyage, and on the evening of the 16th they came on board the *North Star*. I was in my cabin at the time, but a moment later came on deck to receive them. What was my astonishment to see that Mr. Cardew had accompanied them. The moment he saw me he came up and spoke.

"You are surprised to see me here," he said; "but at the eleventh hour I have taken my passage. After all, I found it impossible to remain quietly at home. With such important matters in suspense I felt that I must be in the running at any cost. If Raynor should be still alive there will be no one to give him a more hearty welcome back to the world than I."

As Cardew uttered this barefaced lie I saw him glance at Sibyl. The return of hope had already improved her appearance, the fragile nature of her beauty was less apparent than when I had last seen her. Now, in her travelling-dress, with the wind blowing her soft hair away from her face, her eyes full of light, and a wild-rose colour in her cheeks, she looked as lovely as girl could look. As Cardew uttered those false words she gave him a glance of the purest gratitude. In



"What has happened?" I cried suddenly. "Look at this!"

reply he gazed at her steadily. Straight into her clear brown eyes he looked, he bit his lip, and his face turned pale. I saw the drops stand out on his forehead. It was marvellous to me that neither Miss Theobald nor her father guessed the state of things. For myself, I by no means liked his accompanying us, and felt immediately that, somehow, in some fashion there was mischief ahead.

The voyage flew by without anything special occurring until one morning we were in the Indian Ocean. Theobald and I had been discussing the chart, and he asked to see it in order to study it in connection with an atlas. As we were both busy over it I was suddenly called on deck. This was the first time that the chart had left my hands. I returned within a quarter of an hour, and Theobald handed me the little piece of rice-paper on which so much depended, folded up in its usual form. I slipped it into my pocket-book and returned it to the place which it invariably occupied in my strong-box.

On the following afternoon we were within twenty-four hours of Colombo. On the morning of that day something took me to my strong-box, and, seeing the chart, I opened it, glanced at it half mechanically,

saw that it was all right, and put it back again. On the afternoon of that same day the skipper, Theobald, and I were having tea together, when the conversation drifted to the subject of the chart. Captain Meadows and Mr. Theobald began to differ with regard to the exact point where the island might be supposed to be, and finally I went to fetch the chart in order to compare it with the ship's one in the chart-room on the bridge. We all went to the chart-room, and I there unfolded the chart and laid it on the table. The two men bent eagerly over it.

"Good God! what has happened?" I cried suddenly. "Look at this!" We stared at the chart in absolute bewilderment. Were we all dreaming? No; what we saw was an ugly fact. Across the paper even as we looked there crept a dull, bluish blur that soon fogged the lines and ran the points and marked lines into an indistinguishable smudge.

"What in the name of Heaven does it mean?" I cried. "I looked at the chart this very morning and it was as clear as it had ever been. It is a certain fact that no one has tampered with it since."

"But what is it?" gasped Theobald, his eyes dilating with fear.

I snatched up a piece of paper and roughly and rapidly tried to reproduce the chart before my visual memory of it had faded. It was all useless. I could not reproduce the lines, and the chart before us was nothing more than waste paper.

Theobald sank down on the nearest chair; his face was white and his strong lips trembled; his own and his daughter's hopes were in one moment dashed to the ground.

What did it mean? Who had done it? By what unforeseen agency had this ghastly change come about?

"It is devilry—devilry!" muttered Theobald, and his face took on a more and more scared appearance. Suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"Where is Cardew?" he cried. "I must tell him of this. God help my child! To bring her so far and then to dash all her hopes is past bearing."

Without another word he turned and left us. Captain Meadows and I looked at each other.

"Why, Conway," exclaimed the skipper, "you look as startled as Theobald himself! Have you any explanation to offer?"

"Except this," I answered "someone has tampered with the chart."

"Tampered with it?" cried the captain. "But it looked all right when you first opened it."

"It looked all right, certainly, but was all wrong," was my reply. "Yes, it has been tampered with, and, as Mr. Theobald said, the devil is in this matter."

"But do you suspect anyone?"

"I do, Captain Meadows, but I cannot speak of my suspicions at this moment. I will go away and take a turn by myself."

For many an hour that day I paced the hurricane deck, thought after thought coursing through my brain; but, try as I would, nowhere could I get a solution with regard to the tampered chart. What had been done with it? and, above all things, how had it got into the hands of the only man who would be likely to injure it? On one occasion, and one only, I had left it with Mr. Theobald. Had Cardew got hold of it then? It seemed almost impossible to believe that this was the case, but I thought it worth while to make inquiries. I saw Theobald that evening and put the question to him.

"There is no doubt whatever that the chart has been tampered with," I said: "but how and in what way God only knows. I am not a chemist, nor a scientific man, and cannot therefore solve the mystery; but I

should like to ask you one question, sir. I left the chart in your possession for a few minutes yesterday; did you by any chance put it into the hands of any other person?"

"No, no," he said. "No, no; Cardew and I never lost sight of it for a moment."

"Cardew!" I cried in dismay; "what had he to do with it?"

"He happened to come into my cabin. Sibyl called me, and I left it in his care. When I came back he was bending over it examining it. He is as much interested in the matter as I am. As I said before, anyone would suppose that Sibyl was his daughter. Why, what is the matter, Conway?"

"I am sorry I left the chart with you," was my reply, and then I became silent. My suspicions were strengthened. Cardew had the chart in his possession for a moment or two. What had he done with it during that time? That he had done something was positive.

It was at six o'clock on the evening of the 14th of June that we dropped anchor in the harbour at Batavia. We all immediately got into the launch and made for the quay. Miss Theobald, still looking bright and happy, was with us. Her father had decided up to the present not to tell her anything about the ruined chart. I believe he had a last lingering hope that the old Dutchman, Hans Nausheim, would help us out of our dilemma. The bright eyes of the girl and her happy, confident manner were hard to bear, for I knew only too well that under existing circumstances the Dutchman could do but little. Straining my eyes towards the port I saw his sturdy figure. Yes, he had kept his appointment faithfully. Cardew, too, was standing at the bows; he did not speak, but gazed steadily at the quay as we drew near to it. The next moment we had all sprung on shore. Hans came forward. I drew him aside, and in a few words told him of the disaster. His face paled.

"It is hopeless, then, Mr. Conway," he said. "I trusted you with the chart—you have not kept your trust as you promised."

"The chart was for the space of ten minutes in the hands of Mr. Theobald," I answered.

"Anyone else, sir?"

"A Mr. Cardew; they are both interested in the success of this voyage."

"Aye, aye, that's as it may be," said the old skipper; "but the chart is ruined, and we cannot get to the island. There is no hope whatever, unless, indeed, I find the Kanaka who discovered the dead Malay."



" 'You will both be tried for murder.' "

He left my employment some time ago, and has hidden himself Heaven only knows where I can but search for him."

Meanwhile the rest of the party had gone to the Hôtel des Indes, and I quickly followed them. The hour had come when Miss Theobald must be told.

Theobald drew me aside.

"Can the Dutchman do anything?" he asked in a tremulous whisper.

"Very little, I fear," I replied; "it is your duty, sir, to tell Miss Theobald; you cannot keep her in the dark any longer."

Mr. Theobald looked despairingly round.

He dashed the moisture from his brow, and suddenly turned to his daughter.

"Come with me, Sibyl, I have something to tell you," he said.

She glanced into his face and her own went white. They disappeared into a private room which he had engaged, and he closed the door behind them.

Meanwhile I sauntered in the direction of the coffee-room. I found Cardew smoking a cigar. When he saw me he took it from his lips.

"What is it now?" he said; "is he breaking the news to her?"

"He is," was my curt reply. "The confounded trick which has ruined Miss Theobald's happiness is being explained to her by her father." I could scarcely add any more, I felt it almost impossible to be civil to the scoundrel. I entered the coffee-room. He followed me. The next moment I was startled by a loud exclamation which dropped from his lips.

"In the name of all that's wonderful, Bessemer, how did you turn up here?" he cried.

A slender, dark man dressed in a suit of white drill came forward.

"My yacht happens to be in the harbour," he replied. "I came in this morning; I have been cruising here, there and everywhere. But what has happened to you? Where have you dropped from?"

Cardew, who by this time had controlled his intense excitement, turned and introduced Mr. Bessemer to me. A waiter appeared; Cardew ordered refreshments and invited me to sit down. There was no help for it but to comply. Cardew then told Bessemer the story of our adventures, and Bessemer sympathised much in the destruction of the chart. Then he said, glancing at me for a moment—

"But in any case it could never have applied to poor Raynor, who beyond all doubt was drowned. We were in a typhoon at the time, and it is marvellous we did not all perish."

"Well, it is wonderful meeting you here," said Cardew; "I call it no end of luck. I have not heard anything of you for months and months."

As he spoke I saw the two men exchange glances, and I suddenly resolved to watch them as closely as I could.

My room was on the ground floor, and the door opened on to the verandah. The heat that night was excessive, and my nerves were in too active a state to allow me to

sleep. I blew out the light and sat down in an easy-chair by the door and gave myself up to anxious thought.

The hours dragged on, everything was still. Suddenly I heard a movement in one of the rooms some little distance down the verandah, and the next moment a small tunnel of light shot from the door across the gravelled courtyard. I quickly saw that this light came from Cardew's room. All my keenest suspicions were alert, and I drew back quickly into my own room. The next moment the light went out, and the soft tread of bare feet fell on my ears. A figure, which I quickly saw was Bessemer's, passed my door. What could this mean? The next instant I had made up my mind. If some clandestine scheme were on foot, I would meet guile with guile. In such a case as this any means would justify the end. I crept softly out, stepped over the verandah, and drew swiftly into the dark shadow of a large cactus that stood in the courtyard. Bessemer had evidently gone into Cardew's room. It was perfectly dark now. Then suddenly I heard Cardew's voice in a passionate whisper—

"My God! it has been a near thing, Henry. What do you reckon is the best thing to do now?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing. We are safe," was the light reply. "Raynor will never be seen again. But tell me, how did you manage about the chart? Did you work that?"

"Yes," answered Cardew, with a soft chuckle; "I got hold of it for five minutes and did the deed. I saw when that fool of a purser would not be tampered with, that all depended on the chart, and before I left England I went to a chap who is up in this sort of game. He told me exactly what to do. I painted the paper over with iodide of potassium. It looked exactly the same as before, and it succeeded just as he said it would."

"How? What do you mean?"

"Why, when exposed to the ozone in the sea air the iodine was liberated from the iodide and, combined with the starch in the rice-paper, turned it all blue. It is the regular test for ozone—see?"

"Whew! that's the devil's own trick! And they never discovered?"

"No, and never will now."

"But about Raynor," continued Cardew after a pause, "I only guessed what happened; what did you really do?"

"Left him on an island quite out of any

ship's track. Many thanks for the cheque—it has made me independent for life."

"Do you happen to know where the island is?"

"Rather, never could forget it, could go there blindfold ; but I don't want to—you bet. It's all right, we are as safe as—"

But before he had finished his sentence I had leapt across the verandah and was standing between the men and the open door.

"You're safe, are you, you scoundrels?" I cried.

Two violent oaths burst from the men as they staggered back at my sudden appearance. I held up my hand.

"Quiet, both of you; not a word" I said. "If you make the slightest noise I shall rouse the hotel. Now look here, I have heard everything."

"You wretched eavesdropper!" hissed Cardew between his clenched teeth.

"You can call me anything you please," I answered ; "but listen. Mr. Bessemer, there is only one course open to you. You take us to the island to-morrow, or you know the consequences. Is it Yes or No?" I looked him full in the eyes. He recovered his equanimity and instantly assumed an air of insolent bravado. I maintained mine of quiet resolution. I knew that he was clever enough to see that his game was up.

"You had better be careful, Mr. Conway," said Cardew at last. "It is never safe to tempt desperate men. We are two against one, remember."

I quickly slipped a revolver from my pocket.

"I did not come unprepared," I said. "There is no hope for either of you, if you, Mr. Bessemer, refuse to take us to the island. I have heard all ; I know the trick of the chart, too. You will both be tried for murder."

"Hush!" said Bessemer, standing up quickly. "Put down that revolver ; we won't touch you, of course. If I do what you ask, what guarantee have I that you won't give me away after all?"

"My word for what it is worth, and I believe I can answer for Theobald. If Raynor is alive you shall both go free."

"What do you say, Cardew?" muttered Bessemer. But Cardew said nothing. He continued to gaze at me and took no more notice of Bessemer than if he had not existed.

"Well, Mr. Conway, you leave me no

alternative," said Bessemer at last ; "but remember, this matter will not stop here. I shall claim my satisfaction from you for your underhanded spying. You shall pay for this some day."

I laughed. Bessemer looked again at Cardew, who still remained silent. Bessemer then left the room. As he did so an idea struck me. I went hastily to my own room, took a chair from there, and placing it by his open door, sat down.

"What do you mean by that?" he said angrily.

"Oh, nothing particular," I answered. "It is a hot night, that's all."

He knew well enough why I had done it, and I knew, too, that he was too valuable to leave him any chance of escape.

During the remainder of that night I sat by Bessemer's open door, and all that night also I kept my revolver in my hand. I was determined not to lose sight of Bessemer for a single moment until Theobald appeared. To my great relief at early dawn I heard him come out on to the verandah. I then beckoned him to me.

"I have discovered everything," I said. "Help me to watch Bessemer ; he must not escape. Now listen."

I then told him in Bessemer's presence what had occurred. The poor fellow's excitement, rapture, and relief are beyond my powers to describe. Cardew's treachery was forgotten in his joy about Sibyl.

"Her life will be spared ; nothing else matters, she will be happy yet," he cried. "Yes," he added, turning to Bessemer, "if you take us to the island you shall go free."

"Do not lose sight of him, Mr. Theobald," I said. "I am going now to find Cardew." I went to Cardew's room and knocked, but there was no answer. I opened the door and entered. I found him lying across his bed as if asleep. A glance showed me that he had not undressed. A further glance drew me to his side. I bent over him. I touched him, and started back. He was dead !

"Suicide," I murmured. Yes, his game was up, his passion could never be realised. He had doubtless provided himself with means of escape should his worst fears be realised. An empty bottle lay by his side.

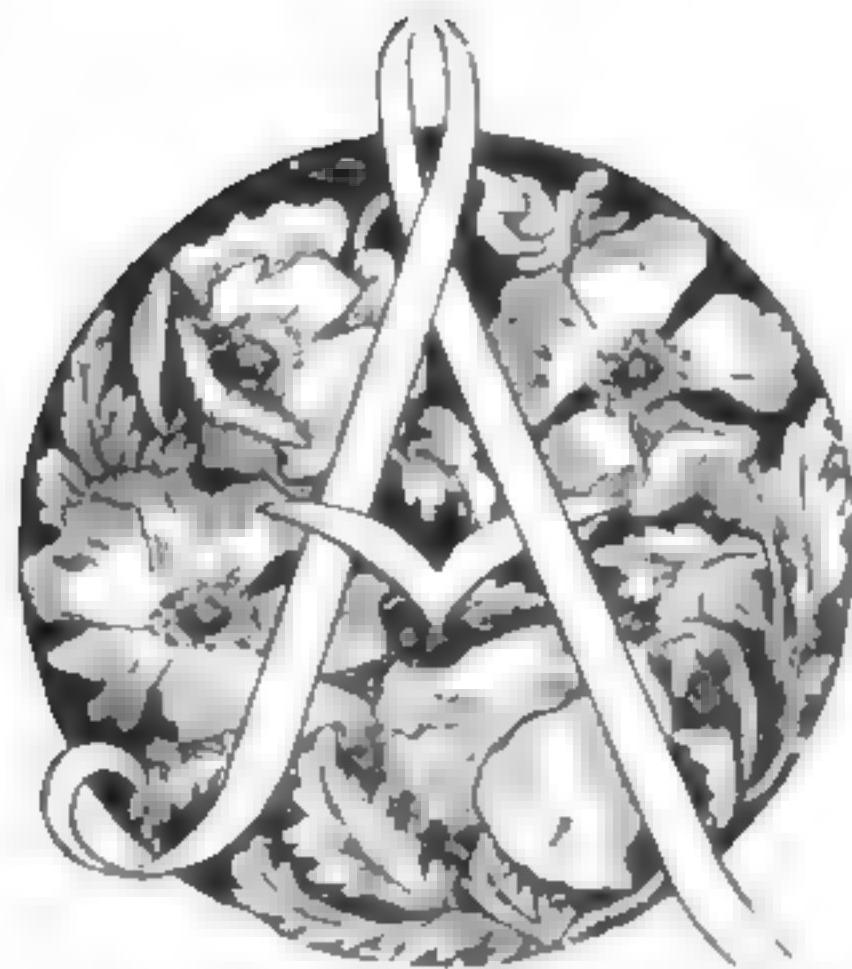
Early that day we started in Bessemer's yacht in search of Jack Raynor. How we found him, Sibyl's delight, the story he had himself to tell of his marvellous escape, all belong to another tale than this.

STORIES OF THE GOLD STAR LINE.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.

Illustrated by ADOLF THIEDE.

IV.—IN THE JAW OF THE DOG.



fairly long spell ashore. I was debating in my mind where I should spend it, when I found a letter at my club from a lady whom I happened to know very well. It ran as follows :

THE RED GRANGE,
CLAPHAM.

Dear Mr. Conway,

I hope you have not forgotten our pleasant intercourse of last year. I have just seen by the papers that the *North Star* has arrived at Tilbury. If you are not already engaged for Christmas, I wish you would come to the Grange and spend it with us. We shall have a large party, and the great Mr. Moss Rucher, to whom my daughter Violet is engaged, will be with us. Please wire on receipt of this.

Yours very truly,
HELEN HARLEY.

I turned this letter over many times before replying to it. I had never cared much for Mrs. Harley, who was a shallow and somewhat artificial person. I had met her at more than one smart gathering in the previous summer and had formed very decided opinions with regard to her. Her daughter Violet, on the other hand, I admired extremely. She appeared to me to be all that her mother was not—sincere, gentle, affectionate, with a sweet manner and a great deal of earnestness about her. She was clever, too, and well educated, but she was not the sort of girl to intrude her knowledge in an unpleasant way. I could fancy a man loving her very much, and guessed, at the time of our last meeting, that the man of all others for her had already appeared on the scene. He was a certain Charlie Bruce, a rising doctor and a great toxicologist. Bruce was a handsome fellow, and he and Violet looked as attractive a pair, when they were seen together, as the heart could desire. It

needed but to glance at her face, with its glowing colour, at her dark bright eyes and sweet mouth, to know how sincerely she was attached to Bruce.

No bin ling words had been spoken yet between the pair, but I expected to hear of their engagement any moment. My surprise, therefore, was very great to learn from her mother's letter that Violet Harley was engaged to Mr. Moss Rucher. Mr. Rucher, the new millionaire—Money Rucher, as they called him in the City—was, of course, well known to me. His immense fortune had been derived from successfully floating some large companies in the West Australian goldfields under the name of the Rucher Syndicate. He frequently travelled by our line to Albany, in West Australia, but had never been in the same ship as myself. I had heard nothing either for or against the man except that he was an astute financier, a synonym, however, nowadays for a person of no very refined scruples. In age he must have been between forty and fifty, and how, even from that point of view, pretty Violet, who was barely eighteen, could think of him, puzzled me a good deal.

Curiosity about her, and a certain dogged wish to know the rights of the case, induced me, therefore, to accept Mrs. Harley's invitation.

I arrived at Clapham the following evening and was surprised to find Bruce waiting for me at the station. The moment I glanced at his face I noticed a serious change there.

"Violet thought you might arrive by this train," he said at once, "so I came to meet you. I wanted to say that I am going out with you to Australia on the 6th."

"For a trip?" I asked.

"No, for good. I am sick of this country. The chances for a medical man here, unless he can buy a share in a good practice, are but poor, and I mean to start a fresh life in place in New South Wales where I have heard of an opening."

"Well," I cried, "this is news, indeed! How completely you have changed your mind! I remember you said last year that nothing would induce you to leave London."

"But last year and this are different," was his reply. Then he added, dropping his voice, "Although we have not met so very often, I feel inclined to trust you, Conway. The fact is this—I have lost the only thing worth staying for. Have you heard that Miss Harley is engaged to Mr. Rucher?"

"Her mother mentioned it when she sent me my invitation. What is the man like?"

of things are not done at the end of the nineteenth century. Besides, Miss Harley has too much character. I doubt if her mother could compel her to do anything she did not cordially approve of herself."

"You cannot tell what pressure may be put upon a young girl. Violet has strong affections and is deeply attached to her mother, worthless as I believe the woman to be. I happen to know that Mrs. Harley's financial affairs have been for a long time in a



"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Conway."

"You will see him when you get to the Grange; the thing is scandalous."

"Are not you coming with me?"

"No; I doubt if I should be welcome. Mrs. Harley knows what my feelings are for Violet, and does her best to keep us apart."

"What do you mean by the thing being scandalous?"

"Well, in the first place, there is not the least doubt that Violet is marrying the man under pressure."

"Oh, impossible!" I cried; "these sort

very critical state, and I am pretty sure that she is under a great obligation to Mr. Rucher. Anyhow, one thing is abundantly plain—Violet does not care two straws for him; indeed, I believe she dislikes him."

"You are cut up about this, old fellow," I said, "and look at the matter through blue spectacles. I sincerely trust you are wrong. I will own, however, that Miss Harley's engagement has disappointed me. I had hoped—"

"Don't say any more," he cried. "When

I think of the marriage my blood boils. When I look at her face I sometimes feel that I shall lose my senses."

A few moments later I found myself walking up the avenue towards the Red Grange, an old house which at one time must have been in the heart of the country, but was now closely surrounded by modern villas.

Mrs. Harley received me with much cordiality, but I did not see Violet or the rest of the guests until just before dinner.

When I entered the large outer drawing-room I noticed that several people, all strangers to me, were present. A tall, heavily built man was standing on the hearthrug. His face immediately arrested my



"Rucher was standing near,
turning the pages."

attention. Mrs. Harley, who was near him, beckoned me to her side.

"Mr. Conway," she said, a sparkle in her light blue eyes; "let me introduce you to my special friend, Mr. Moss Rucher."

I bowed an acknowledgment and fixed my eyes on the man's face. As I did so my heart sank. Was pretty, gentle little Violet to be sacrificed to an individual more than double her age, and who bore all over his face traces of a career the reverse of honourable? In his small, deep-set, and shifty eyes, his thin upper lip and lantern jaws, I read both cruelty and avarice. The man was well dressed and spoke with a certain evidence of good breeding, but with all his efforts he could not keep the soul which guided him

quite below the surface. The meanness of that indwelling spirit shone in his eyes and reflected its emotions round those lips which could be, if the occasion warranted, so cruel.

"Before God!" I murmured under my breath, "Bruce is right; no girl would marry such a man were she not forced to do so. What can the mother mean?"

I was so taken aback that it was with some difficulty I could conceal my surprise by the usual conventional remarks.

"It was good of you to come, Mr. Conway," said my hostess, breaking the somewhat awkward pause with a silly and nervous laugh. "I wonder where Violet can be; she will be delighted to see you, and I have been so anxious to introduce you to Mr. Rucher."

"I have often travelled by your line, sir," said Rucher, now favouring me with a more attentive glance.

I was about to reply when I saw his eyes fixed on a distant door; I looked in the same direction and saw Violet. She came slowly up to where I was standing, and as she approached I saw Rucher's eyes twinkle with suppressed satisfaction. I disliked him for this expression more than ever. The young girl gave him a faint smile and then held out her hands to me.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Conway," she cried. "Mother, I hope that you have arranged that Mr. Conway takes me to dinner; I sha'n't go with anyone else."

"Come, come, Violet," said Mr. Rucher, "you forget yourself—that is my privilege." He spoke with a sort of heavy attempt at a joke, but I read displeasure in his glance.

"It is not your privilege to-night," she answered. "Mr. Conway is an old friend, and I am going to give him my company during dinner."

Rucher's cheeks flamed with an angry colour; he turned away from Violet and addressed Mrs. Harley.

"Come and stand in this window," said the girl to me; "the night is quite warm."

We crossed to the deep embrasure of a bay window—here she immediately lowered her voice.

"I asked Charlie Bruce to meet you at the station; did I guess the right train?"

"Yes," I answered; "I hoped that Bruce was staying in the house."

"Oh, no ; he went back to London after seeing you here."

"He is much changed," I said.

Her pretty lips trembled ; her eyes, wide open, clear and beautiful, fixed themselves without the least embarrassment on my face.

"He will be quite well when he goes to Australia," she said slowly ; "he is very clever and will make a career for himself. Now, please, let us talk of something else."

The dinner signal was given and a moment later I found myself at Violet's side at a long and brilliantly decorated dining-table. As soon as the conversation had become general she dropped her voice and turned to me.

"He is going out in your ship," she said.

I did not need to inquire whom she meant.

"Yes," I answered.

"Perhaps you will see him sometimes in Australia?"

"Scarcely likely. He tells me that he is going to a place in New South Wales, quite away from the coast."

As I spoke I looked at her, saw that she was only playing with her food, and suddenly made up my mind to speak.

"Your engagement to Mr. Rucher has taken me by surprise," I said.

"Why should it?" she answered. "I am supposed to be making a very good match."

I was silent.

"Don't you think so?" she continued.

I looked at her and replied slowly—

"If having plenty of money means a good match, you are right, Miss Harley. If to secure happiness is a good match, then I don't think you are about to make it."

She turned very pale.

"I felt when you were coming that you would say something of this kind," she said ; "you take Charlie's part."

"I do," I said boldly ; "you love him and you ought to marry him."

"A girl cannot always think of herself. But please do not say any more ; you will upset me. It is necessary that I should marry Mr. Rucher ; I do it for——"

"For your mother's sake."

"You know too much, Mr. Conway, but I will answer you bravely. Yes, I do it for mother's sake. This thing means her happiness. Charlie will get over it some day, and I—well, the approval of one's conscience must go a good way towards securing a contented mind."

"In this case your conscience ought not to approve ; but, as you say, it is no business of mine."

"I did not say so, but please do not let us talk of it any more just now. Girls cannot always please themselves, and I—I am not sorry."

"I must add one thing, and then I promise to drop the subject," I replied. "Your motives are mistaken ; you are doing evil that good may come. That sort of thing never answered and never will."

Her next-door neighbour turned at this moment to speak to Miss Harley. She replied with a certain eagerness, and for the rest of dinner scarcely spoke a word to me.

Just before I retired for the night she found her way again to my side.

"How long are you going to stay?" she asked.

"To-morrow will be Christmas Day ; I shall leave the day after."

"To-morrow," she said—"I shall be occupied all to-morrow ; I may not have another opportunity. I wonder if you will promise me something."

"Certainly."

"Then look after Charlie during the voyage ; do what you can to cheer him up." Tears brimmed into her eyes. Just at that moment Mrs. Harley's voice was heard.

"Violet ! Violet ! where are you?" she said. "Mr. Rucher wants you to sing the 'Canadian Boat Song' again."

She left me without a word. The next moment her sweet voice filled the room. Rucher was standing near, turning the pages of her music. I felt sick at heart.

I saw hardly anything of Miss Harley the next day, and never for a moment alone. Early the following morning I left the Grange, and on the 6th of January Bruce and I started for Australia. Violet's wedding was, I understood, to take place soon. I resolved to say as little as possible of the matter to my friend.

During the early part of the voyage we met with rough weather, and my time was occupied with the wants of the different passengers ; but shortly after leaving Colombo my duties became less heavy, and Bruce now constantly sought my company. I saw by his face that he was longing to unburden himself, and one night as we paced up and down he began to speak.

"It is terrible," he said, "that there is no law to prevent such abominable things."

"What do you mean?" I answered.

"You must know to what I am alluding—to Violet's marriage, to the fact that the whole future happiness of her life is at stake. She is too noble a girl to see her mother

ruined and disgraced. There is no saving her, unless that brute Rucher were suddenly to lose all his money ; but that would have to happen immediately, as they are to be married so soon. If I could only ruin him — my God ! wouldn't I do it ! ”

“ To expose him would be better,” I said, speaking quietly.

He looked me full in the face.

“ You feel about him as I do,” he said.

“ I cordially hate the man,” I replied.

“ Shake hands on that,” cried the young fellow. He seized my hand and shook it violently.

“ And, after all,” I continued, in a meditative voice, “ men like Rucher often lose money as quickly as they make it.”

“ I wish he might lose every penny he ever got. If he could only go smash before the wedding, Violet would be safe ; but there is no such luck in store.”

I tried to cheer him up as well as I could. After listening to my well-meant attempts at consolation for a few moments, he said in a voice which somehow completely shut me up—

“ There's no use in it, Conway ; I don't even listen when you attempt commonplace consolations. It is the bitterest pill of my whole life. I have got to swallow it, and, by God ! I cannot smile over the thing. If it were only my happiness it would not greatly matter, but she is miserable, too.”

“ I am afraid she is,” I replied ; “ there is no doubt whatever that she loves you and has not the smallest affection for that scoundrel Rucher.”

“ Then why, in the name of everything sacred, does she marry him ? If I were a girl I wouldn't give myself away to a brute of that sort.”

“ She does it for her mother's sake.”

“ That's just it, Conway, and that's where the pull is so hard. The girl is determined to complete the sacrifice, being utterly in the dark as to what she is putting her hand to ; and a fellow who would give his life for her has to stand by and do nothing. I tell you it's beastly, and sometimes I feel as if my mind were going.”

I was called just then to attend to an immediate duty and left him. I had no more conversation with him on the subject of Violet for the rest of the voyage, and hoped that with all the hard work which lay before him he would partly forget his troubles.

We arrived in Sydney Harbour on Tuesday, the 18th of February, about five o'clock in

the evening. Just before we arrived, Bruce came into my cabin to say good-bye. He looked very depressed and said he felt that by leaving the ship he was about to cut his last tie with the Old Country and his past life. He had arranged to go up country immediately, but I promised that if I got time I would see him again before he started.

“ Remember one thing,” I said, as we shook hands at parting, “ there is not a girl on earth who ought to spoil a man's life. Show your affection for Miss Harley by doing the best you can with your life, Bruce.”

“ Aye, I will try,” he answered. “ I hope I'll see you again, Conway. I shall put up at the Prince's Hotel, and this is my final address. Send me a line now and then, and when you get home let me know how she is.”

I gave him my promise to do this. He had hardly left me when a knock came to my door and a steward entered.

“ Captain Meadows wants to see you on deck, sir.”

I replied that I would go immediately.

“ Ah, Conway,” said the skipper when he saw me, “ here you are ; we are both wanted immediately at the office for some urgent reason ; the launch is ready to take us ashore. Come along.”

In some surprise I accompanied the skipper. This unusual summons evidently meant something of great importance. We reached the Circular Quay in a few moments and drove at once to the office of our Company in Peter's Street, where we were shown into the private room of the manager, Mr. Aldridge. The moment we entered he closed the door and turned towards us.

“ I am sorry to have been obliged to summon you both in such an unusual manner,” he said, “ but circumstances have arisen which necessitate the *North Star* leaving here on its return voyage at the earliest possible moment. How soon can she unload ? ”

“ Well, her cargo happens to be very little, and with extra hands it could be done in twenty-four hours,” replied Captain Meadows. “ As far as I know, there are no repairs necessary, so she would be ready for sea again the day after to-morrow, unless there is cargo to come in.”

“ There will be none. Her ballast will be coal. I have arranged that ; and you, Mr. Conway, will please attend to the stores without a moment's delay. This is a very important Government matter ; and if the *North Star* cannot be got ready in time

another liner will be employed, which will mean considerable loss to our Company."

He paused, and we both stared at him. Doubtless our astonishment was visible on our faces.

"I will tell you the exact state of affairs," continued Mr. Aldridge. "It is a matter not only of the greatest importance, but also of the profoundest secrecy. I must pledge you both, therefore, gentlemen, to promise that on no account whatsoever will you divulge to anyone what I am going to say."

We both at once gave our assurances, and I began to feel intensely curious to know what was coming. Mr. Aldridge leant forward in his chair and began to speak in a low tone.

"You have heard, of course, of the great Rucher Syndicate of the West Australian Goldfields?"

An exclamation that I could not repress broke involuntarily from my lips.

He stared at me in some curiosity.

"Perhaps, Mr. Conway, you have been bitten in that direction?"

"No," I answered, "those sort of speculations never tempt me; but I have, of course, heard of the Syndicate - indeed, I may as well own that I am much interested in this matter." Then, as he still continued to stare at me as if in alarm, I went on, "I happen to know someone who is also deeply interested in the Rucher Syndicate."

"Then I am truly sorry for him, and I am equally sorry for you, for by the promise you have just made me you have bound yourself not to inform him of the monstrosity of the whole scheme. It is simply a hideous imposture, a modern South Sea Bubble."

"What?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, it is a big financial swindle, and the exposure of the whole affair depends on our bringing safely to England one of the gang who is going to turn Queen's evidence. On this man's evidence in London the whole lot will be convicted, and the exposure will include I hardly dare to say how many men of reputed integrity who are involved in it. It will be a revelation to the public. The Treasury have entrusted us to bring this man home. He is at present under the closest police escort, and two detectives will travel with him. You see now what a serious matter it is; but what makes it far more serious is that the authorities fear that the whole circumstance of his betrayal will leak out, and if that is the case you may be sure that the rascals, with their reputation at

stake and with enormous resources at their command, won't leave a stone unturned to prevent him arriving in England alive. They will stop at nothing. However, once on board he will be safe enough, as every precaution will be taken here that no one but those with unquestionable credentials will be allowed to go home by the *North Star*. Our agents at every port of call on the way will be advised, and it will be your business, Mr. Conway, to aid the authorities in every possible manner, and yours, Captain Meadows, to see that the ship is ready to sail the day after to-morrow, or, at latest, early

"Strapping a large
permanently."



on Friday morning. The arrangements are these. It will be given out to-morrow that Mr. Dixon Boys intends going overland to Albany to inspect the goldfields, or on some such business. This, of course, will be false, and on Thursday evening he will be secretly and quickly taken down to the *North Star* just before she is ready to sail. Any fresh instructions will be sent to you, Captain Meadows."

"I will do my best, Mr. Aldridge," he replied; "and the sooner I set to work the better."

We took our leave. The captain returned to the ship, and I, hailing a hansom, drove off in great haste to the Prince's Hotel.

Fortune had turned with a vengeance. If Violet Harley's marriage could be delayed until after we got home, her mother's game would be put a stop to. How best to achieve this was the problem which now exercised my mind almost to the exclusion of anything else.

On reaching the hotel I heard that Bruce was in his room and went up to him at once. I found him surrounded by a miscellaneous assortment of luggage. He had just finished



"Hauled up the gangway by its collar."

his final packing and was strapping a large portmanteau. As I entered he looked up.

"Hallo ! Conway," he cried ; "so you have come to see the last of me. I am off in half an hour to Wallengabba."

"No, Bruce, you are not," I answered, sitting down opposite to him.

He stared at me in blank surprise.

"What on earth do you mean ?" was his reply.

I laid my hand on his shoulder.

"My dear boy," I said, "I am going to ask a big thing of you."

"Anything in my power," he replied, fixing his frank and still boyish eyes on my face.

"I want you to trust me completely."

"Trust you ? I believe I do, Conway."

"I want you to trust me to the extent of throwing up that appointment of yours and returning with me in the *North Star* to England."

"Now, what do you mean ?" he cried.

"I cannot explain, Bruce, and that is where your faith must come in. I believe that to your dying day you will never regret it. Just at the present moment I am so full of hope about you that I scarcely dare to express myself. You are wanted in England, and that place at Wallengabba must do without you."

"But you surely will tell me something more ?" he cried. "I have spent money on this thing. I have said good-bye to all my friends, and Violet is lost to me. Do you mean," he continued, suddenly springing to his feet, "do you mean that that brute has lost his money ? How ? Quick, tell me."

"I cannot," I answered ; "I am bound by a solemn promise. You must trust me and come home as it were in the dark, or you must go your own way."

He reeled back for a moment and I almost thought he would fall.

"Conway, you drive me nearly mad ; but I—yes, of course, I trust you. Are you quite certain that I shall never regret this step ?"

"As certain as man can be."

"I cannot live in the same country as Violet when she becomes Rucher's wife." He stared into my face as he spoke, then he took a step forward. "Do you mean—do you mean to imply that she will never be his wife ?"

"I can say nothing," I answered. "Cancel your ticket, Bruce, and take your passage in the *North Star*. I will see that you get a berth."

"But can there be any doubt about that ?" he asked in some surprise.

"Unless you are guaranteed by me, yes ; but do what I say and don't ask questions. Now, then, which is it to be ?"

"I have no choice in the matter ; you put it so that I cannot refuse. I fail to understand you, but I will go with you."

"You will never regret it, old chap ; and now I must be off, for I have a tremendous lot to do, as we shall leave at the latest on Thursday night. Don't breathe a word of this to anyone at the hotel, keep your own

counsel ; the darker the thing is kept the better for our success."

" You may rely on me, Conway. This is all a complete upheaval, and I do not think I quite realise it, but at any rate I will do as you say and come on board to-morrow."

" By the way," I said, as I left the room, " can you tell me the exact date of Miss Harley's wedding ? "

" The 15th of April ; I remember it only too well."

I considered for a moment.

" We shall be home in time," I said then, and without waiting to read the expression on his face I hurriedly left him.

The news of our intended departure had evidently been already communicated to the crew, and when I reached the ship the greatest activity was manifest everywhere. My own work occupied me all day and nearly all night. Charlie Bruce came on board on Thursday afternoon, but I had not an instant to speak to him. We were ready to sail at ten o'clock that evening, and a few moments before the hour of starting Boys made his appearance. He was a quiet, slender, timorous-looking man, with sunken brown eyes and a long, cadaverous face. About his clean-shaven mouth was an expression at once of weakness and of obstinacy. He glanced round him in a half-frightened way, but I was relieved to see that he had not only the manners but the appearance of a gentleman. It was absolutely necessary that he should come on board as an ordinary passenger, and the detectives who accompanied him were supposed by the crew to be, one his private secretary and the other his servant. He was accommodated with a special cabin to himself and every comfort was given to him.

Boys had scarcely crossed the gangway, and under the escort of the two detectives was making his way towards the companion, before the *North Star*, without a single indication, or any signal to say that we were starting, slipped her moorings and quietly glided out of the harbour. As we cleared the promontory and I saw the harbour lights grow dimmer and dimmer behind us, I owned to a feeling of relief. The tension and strain and half-expectancy of some impossible disaster happening at the last moment had told upon me more than I cared to own, but now at last we were safe and I went below at once, for I needed a long sleep badly.

That there was something mysterious connected with our trip, and that this mystery in some unaccountable way sur-

rounded Mr. Dixon Boys, the small number of our return passengers were evidently aware. But what that mystery was they could not possibly divine, as the secret was only known to Captain Meadows, the chief officer, and myself. All speculations were therefore fruitless. The prisoner was allowed every possible liberty and soon made friends with more than one of his fellow-passengers. Bruce in especial often sought the company of Dixon Boys, engaging him in long and earnest conversation. On one occasion, soon after we had started, he gave me his opinion very frankly with regard to our fellow-traveller.

" I cannot make him out," he said ; " he is interesting, but also queer. The slightest thing makes him start as though he were pursued by some imaginary foe. Then he will tell me nothing about himself. I never saw anyone so reserved and yet apparently so unreserved. He begins to make a confidence and then breaks off abruptly. If ever a man seemed to have something weighing heavily on his mind, he is the person."

" Don't try to draw him out, that's all," I said. " The fact is, Bruce, the less you have to do with Boys the better."

Bruce looked at me with curiosity. After a long pause he said abruptly—

" I wonder if I have been wise in throwing up my appointment. I have sunk a thousand pounds in it—I shall never see that money again."

" Ask me a week after we have landed my true opinion on that point," was my answer. " I cannot say any more at present."

" You puzzle me very nearly as much as Boys does, Conway. Ah, there he is ; I shall go and have a smoke with him."

Day after day went by. We were steadily going northwards at our fullest speed. On the 5th of March we arrived at Colombo, but only stopped for an hour for the mails and again hastened on. It was, I remember, about ten o'clock on a moonless night—the exact date by the ship's log was the 8th of March, and our position latitude $11^{\circ} 23'$ east, longitude $61^{\circ} 5'$ north, nearly the centre of the Indian Ocean. Charlie Bruce and I were sitting together in the stern beneath the awning. The air was clear, as it only can be clear in the tropics. Except for a regular swell, the surface of the sea was as oil and smooth as a millpond. My companion moved restlessly, and I knew well from his manner the subject which was uppermost in his mind. Our conversation was broken by long pauses. Once I heard

Bruce uttered an impatient sigh. Moved by an impulse I laid my hand on his shoulder.

"I am sorry for you, old fellow," I said. "I know this waiting in the dark is hard; but, unless some absolutely impossible and improbable accident happens, take my word for it that everything will be right."

"Accident!" he cried; "how mysterious you are! What possible accident can happen?"

I was silent. He edged closer to me.

"If ever a man held a secret," he began, "Dixon Boys is the man."

"You think so?" I said cautiously.

"Think so—I am certain of it. I never saw anyone so wretched."

"He has not been confiding in you, Bruce?"

"No, I almost wish he had. I sometimes wonder if Boys holds my fortune in the hollow of his hand."

I did not reply. Bruce had guessed the truth, but my promise prevented my enlightening him.

"You will know all when you get home," I said, after a long pause; "but do not encourage Boys to make confidences."

"Then there is something special about him?"

"Yes, Charlie; but it is unfair to press me any more."

I had scarcely said the words when the look-out Lascar in the forecastle sounded his gong with a double blow, thus announcing a light on the port bow. The clang had scarcely died away on the still air when the deep boom of a gun reverberated across the sea.

We were on our feet in a moment and ran forward just in time to see a rocket towering up in a fiery line straight ahead of us. It burst in a shower of stars that floated down and died out one by one.

"By Jove! there's a ship in distress," I cried; "I wonder who she is."

The sound of the gun had brought the passengers hurrying on deck. I heard an order shouted from the bridge, and the next moment our whistle sounded, accompanied by an answering rocket.

"Who is she, captain?" I asked, as the skipper hurried past us.

"I don't know yet; some miserable tramp, I suppose," was his quick answer; "but we shall see directly."

We made straight for her, and as we drew near we could see that she was a small steam yacht, about five hundred tons, and evidently sinking fast—so fast, indeed, that we could almost see her taffrail nearing the water-line

each moment. Not an instant was to be lost, and two lifeboats and the gig were lowered. They were only just in time, for before they were halfway back to the *North Star* with the crew, we saw the vessel heel over, and with a loud explosion that hid her for a moment in a cloud of steam, she plunged head down and disappeared in a vortex of broken water.

The excitement was intense, for it was evident that had we been a few moments later she would have gone down with all hands.

By this time the gangway had been lowered and the rescued men were coming on board. Their appearance was certainly not prepossessing, and belied the evanescent glimpse we had caught of their apparently aristocratic vessel. A more cut-throat, black-guard-looking set of men I had seldom seen. There was not a decent-looking fellow amongst them. The last to come on board was the skipper, a foreigner, from his appearance. He was accompanied by an ill-favoured mongrel, which he hauled up the gangway by its collar. He gave his name as Nicola Marini, and told us that he was a Sicilian by birth. He spoke English fluently, however, and was able to explain the nature of their disaster. The name of the vessel, he said, was the *Seagull*, a private yacht purchased from a gentleman in England by a Parsee. Marini and his crew were taking her to Bombay. They had, he said, six hours ago struck a derelict and sprung some of their bow plates, and though all hands had ceaselessly worked the pumps, nothing could save her.

I made arrangements at once for the accommodation of our unlooked-for passengers. To my surprise the skipper, Marini, announced his intention of taking his dog with him to his cabin. I protested against this, and after some heated words, in which I told him that it would be contrary to our regulations, he submitted with a surly expression of dissatisfaction, and the brute was consigned to the care of the butcher. The dog was as ugly and ill-favoured a creature as I had ever seen, with bloodshot eyes and a snarling expression.

As soon as the excitement had settled down a little, and the passengers had retired to their berths, I went to my own cabin. Eight bells had gone, and I was just about to turn in when Captain Meadows entered. His face was peculiarly grave and stern.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I replied. "I have quartered



"Hurled him back against the mast."

them in the second saloon ; I suppose we shall have to take them back to England."

"I suppose so," he said. "What do you think of them, Conway ?"

"A pretty queer lot, from the look of them," I answered.

"Yes," he replied, "about as queer as their yarn about the derelict. Between you and me, I don't believe a word of it—it is the most impossible story I have ever listened to. I cannot make it out a bit."

"But what do you suppose struck the yacht ?" I asked in some surprise.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know ; it's a mystery."

"There might have been a derelict drifting about," was my slow reply.

"Might ! Very much might," he retorted. "I don't want to be over-suspicious, but you know whom we have got on board."

"You mean Dixon Boys ?"

He nodded.

I started up and stared at him as I caught the drift of his thoughts.

"You mean that it is a plant, a put-up job ? Impossible !" I said, aghast at his unspoken suggestion.

"Who knows ? there are millions at stake ; it is as likely as not."

"How could they have done it ?" I cried.

"What easier ? They knew our track. They had only to wait for us, send up a rocket, and, directly we answered it, scuttle the boat. We should be bound to take them in. More unlikely things have happened before now," he went on. "In any case, Conway, I want you to be closely on the look-out. I have warned the chief officer and told him what I think. I may be wrong, of course, but it won't do to allow our wits to slumber for a single moment now. All I say is, watch them."

He left me with these words, and I sat on the edge of my bunk thinking matters over. It would certainly never have occurred to me that any men, however desperate, would resort to such a method of waylaying a victim on the high seas. Still, the skipper was a man who rarely said anything without good reason, and it behoved me to give his words every consideration.

I passed a wakeful night. If Captain Meadows's suspicions were correct, not only was the life of our prisoner in jeopardy, and the exposure of the whole Rucher Syndicate likely to be foiled, but also the happiness of Bruce and Violet Harley would be imperilled. The issues dependent on Boys's life were certainly heavy.

I got up early and went on deck. The Lascars were still washing and cleaning, and I had scarcely reached my accustomed seat before Bruce and Boys joined me. It was their custom to do so every morning while in the tropics, and on this occasion they both showed unwonted excitement. The occurrence of the previous evening began to be discussed eagerly.

"The crew of the *Seagull* had a narrow shave," said Boys, lighting a cheroot.

"They had, indeed," I replied ; "another ten minutes and I would not have given much for their chances."

"How are the men this morning ?" asked Bruce.

"I have not seen anything of them yet," I replied. "Hallo ! though, here comes the skipper with that brute of a mongrel."

As I spoke the words the man who had just mounted the ladder from the mizzen hatchway came sauntering towards us. I had seldom seen a more ill-favoured looking individual ; with his swarthy complexion, irregular features and bull-dog head, and a cast in one eye, he looked as if no evil work would be too bad for him.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said, coming up and seating himself unbidden in a chair close to us.

As I looked at him the force of the skipper's words came strongly upon me.

"Come here and lie down, Juan," he called to the dog. The animal had been edging up to us snarling. He now crouched at his master's feet, blinked his bloodshot eyes at him, and cowered down.

"What sort of animal do you call that ?" asked Boys, regarding the dog with unmistakable disfavour.

"He is not much to look at, I confess," laughed the man ; "but I couldn't leave him to drown. He's been a faithful friend to me, and as to tricks, why he's half human. See here. Get up and walk round, Juan." As he spoke he gave the dog a savage kick with his foot. The brute never stirred, but gave a surly growl.

"You won't, won't you ? Too lazy, eh ?" cried Captain Marini, flying into an instant passion. He caught the poor animal by the scruff of the neck and began to beat him unmercifully with his clenched fist.

"Here, stop that, you scoundrel !" cried Boys, his eyes flashing with rage at the brutal cruelty. "Stop it, or I'll—" He made a sudden dash forward, and the dog, now goaded to fury, and as if to protect his

master, flew at Boys and bit him savagely just below the knee.

Marini, now in a perfect fury, seized the animal in both hands, and holding him up high above his head ran to the side to throw him overboard. But before he could carry out this most brutal act I had leapt across his path and hurled him back against the mast, while the dog ran howling down the deck.

The noise of the scuffle brought Captain

"See you keep the brute safe," were his final words.

Leading Juan by a chain which had been brought on deck, the quartermaster disappeared down the hatchway.

"It is time for us to think of you, Boys," I said, turning to the injured man. "I hope the dog did not hurt you much?"

"Oh, nothing very bad," was his reply. He was standing up, looking pale, but quite composed.



"Injected something into his arm."

Meadows from his cabin, and in a few words, interrupted by Marini's angry expostulations, I explained the situation. The skipper's face paled as I spoke, and he gave me a glance of reproach which I shall never forget. Then he turned to Marini. What he said I cannot repeat, but the man slunk away, wincing under the scathing lash of the captain's words.

By this time the dog had been secured by the quartermaster. Captain Meadows went up to him and said something in a low tone.

The man nodded.

"All the same, a bite is a bite," cried Bruce, "and you may as well let me cauterise it, or send for Martin, the ship's doctor, to do it, if you prefer."

At that moment Martin himself was seen hurrying towards us.

"What's up?" he said. "You have been bitten, I hear, Boys. Let me look at the wound. I saw the dog; he looks queer enough, and——"

"Good God!" I muttered under my breath. I did not dare to say the awful

thought which had flashed through my mind.

Boys sat down, pulled up his trouser, and allowed Martin and Bruce to examine the wound. It was not so deep as I had expected, and after it was cauterised Martin dressed it.

" You need not be at all anxious now," he said, looking at Boys; " we have cauterised the wound in time. Now Bruce and I will help you down to your cabin."

Boys stood up, and the two medical men gave him each an arm. But he had scarcely taken a couple of steps before, to our horror, he suddenly reeled and sank in a heap upon the deck.

" Good God, look here ! " cried Bruce ; " the man is poisoned." He bent over him and instantly grasped the situation, with all the keenness of his own special knowledge.

I stared at the fallen man in horror ; his face was flushed, his eyes glassy and prominent ; he was mumbling and muttering noisily to himself. Bruce gave one eager look into his eyes and then rushed to his cabin. He returned in a few moments.

" What, in Heaven's name, can it be ? " I said to him.

" Something in the belladonna line. Get out the way ; this is his only chance ! "

He knelt down, pulled up the sleeve of Boys's jacket, and injected something into his arm.

" There, now, let us get him into his cabin," he said, turning to Martin. " It is a bit of luck, my having my antidote-case and some pilocarpine discs. But he is not out of the wood yet, by any means. This is a queer go."

We carried the poor fellow to his cabin and laid him on his bunk. The captain had followed us. Bruce turned to me.

" It's lucky you prevented Marini throwing the dog overboard," he said ; " I want to see his mouth."

" He is chained up in the hatchway," said the captain ; " but you don't suppose he is mad, do you ? "

" It cannot be that, the effect was too instantaneous. I may be wrong, but I have a certain suspicion. I must see the dog immediately, I must look into his mouth."

" I will go with you. I suspected it, I own, only I thought it would be hydrophobia. This is a development I cannot understand."

The two doctors, the captain, and I now went aft. There we found the dog tied up. He was perfectly quiet and was lying down with his head between his front paws ; when he saw Bruce he wagged his tail. Bruce bent down

and patted him, and then, putting his hand quietly under his lower jaw, he raised the upper lip, and, opening his mouth, examined his teeth one by one.

" Ah ! here we are," he cried. " So this is why Marini wanted to throw him overboard. What a devilish idea ! "

" But what is it ? " cried the captain, bending down and looking also into the brute's open jaw.

" Why, this," cried Bruce, pointing to the great canine fang ; " see ! *it is a false one.*" As he spoke he seized the tooth between his finger and thumb and with a little effort brought it out. With infinite skill the tooth had been kept in its place with a gold plate, and by a perfect piece of mechanism, on pressing the sharp end, which was hollow, a little receptacle was compressed behind it. This had evidently contained the poison which Bruce said most probably was hyoscyamine.

" An exact imitation of the rattlesnake's arrangement," he said. " Whatever can be the meaning of it all ? "

The captain waited to hear no more.

" I'll have every one of those men in irons ! " he cried, running quickly up the ladder. " Save Boys, for God's sake ! "

We returned to the sick man's cabin, thunderstruck by our horrible discovery.

" See—he is opening his eyes—consciousness is returning ! " said the ship's doctor.

Just at that moment the skipper appeared in the doorway of the cabin.

" Well," he said, " is there any chance ? If he dies, Marini shall swing for it. I will expose the whole dastardly scheme the moment we get ashore."

" Hush ! " said Martin. " Don't speak so loud. I believe that he is better.

* * * * *

The rest of the story is soon told. Marini and his crew had been already placed in irons. Dixon Boys recovered very slowly under the watchful care of Bruce and Martin, and by the time we reached England he was nearly himself again.

Yes, we were in time. The wedding had not yet taken place. The Syndicate was exposed, and the villain, Moss Rucher, thought it best to secure safety in flight.

Bruce and Violet Harley were engaged. I met Violet soon afterwards and she was good enough to say she owed her happiness to me. I think she was prejudiced in my favour, and told her so, but she stuck to her opinion.

STORIES OF THE GOLD STAR LINE.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.

Illustrated by ADOLF THIEDE.

No. V.—THE YELLOW FLAG.



ONE hot night in September, 1896, Dr. Martin, our ship's doctor, and I were having a quiet dinner at the Caulfield Hotel in Melbourne. The *North*

Star was to sail for England on the following day, and amongst other matters we were discussing the possibilities of the voyage, what passengers we might expect on board, and what adventures we were likely to have. The meal proceeded cheerily, for we were both in the best of spirits. We had nearly finished, and were having a smoke with our coffee, when I suddenly noticed that Martin was gazing intently across the room. I heard him say, half aloud—

"Well, if that is not the man himself, it is his ghost."

"What do you mean?" I cried, turning in the direction in which he was looking.

Martin bent towards me.

"Do you see that fellow sitting at the table to your right—a sunburnt chap with black hair? He is either my old friend, Dudley Wilmot, or his ghost. I have not seen Wilmot for years, and what brings him here now is more than I can imagine. When last we met he was in London, and he was as jolly a young fellow as you could find in a day's march, but as wild as a hawk. I believe he was guilty of some boyish escapade, nothing very great in itself, but sufficiently bad in the eyes of all his people to make them send him out of England. By Jove! it is himself; he has spotted us and is coming over."

As Martin spoke a tall, broad-shouldered man of about thirty got up from his seat at the table where he had been dining and

came towards us with a smile on his face. He was in a tweed suit, and in defiance of appearances was smoking a short black pipe. His deeply tanned face showed him to be no townsman.

"Hullo, Dudley! Where in the world did you spring from?" said Martin, rising and shaking hands with him. "I thought it must be you; let me introduce Mr. Conway, our purser."

Wilmot bowed to me and took a seat at our table.

"I only came down last Tuesday from Queensland," he said. "I have had a pretty rough time since I met you at my old uncle's house five years ago."

"What have you been doing?"

"Wandering up and down and to and fro on the earth, as usual; but I have been buried in the bush for four years, and am about sick of it. I am going home to-morrow. By the bye, you are still doctor on the *North Star*?"

"Yes."

"That is good; I am going in her, and I am right glad to see you. I believe I am in for a bit of luck."

He spoke in an excited manner and a flush had risen to his bronzed face.

"Well, you look pretty jolly," said Martin; "what is the luck?"

"You would like to have a chat alone?" I said, rising. Wilmot jumped up also.

"Not at all," he exclaimed; "in fact, I would rather you know, Mr. Conway, than otherwise. I will tell you both if you listen."

"I shall be much interested," I answered. I sat down again.

"It is the queerest story," he began. "I have had a rough time since I came out, and have been through the mire—Jackeroo, storekeeper, horseboy, drover—the usual round; then one season I struck a piece of luck and bought a small sheep station. For a year everything went well—plenty of water and grass, and wool at a high figure. Then last year came the drought, and on the top

of it the floods. It is always the way in this country. One is always gambling with the weather ; and of course I lost. Well, last month things were so bad that I mortgaged my station up to the hilt, and the outlook got worse and worse, and I thought it was a clear case for the bankruptcy court. But last week, just a fortnight ago, the wife and I were having supper in our little house, when she started and read something aloud from a paper which had been sent up from Brisbane. I tell you it astonished us both."

As he spoke he pulled a newspaper from

"And what does this all mean ?" said Martin ; "it sounds good."

"I will tell you," he answered. "I came straight away down, you can bet, and went at once to Fisher & Co. They showed me a letter from their firm at home, asking them to find one of us, and for this reason. You know I have been cut off from all communication with the Old Country. I got into my father's black books, and he forbade any of the old folks to have the slightest communication with me. They never wrote to me, and I never wrote to them. My father,



"This is the paragraph," he said."

his pocket, and, handing it across to Martin, invited us to look at it.

"This is the paragraph," he said.

Martin read aloud as follows :—

"If Henry Dudley Wilmot, son of David Wilmot, of Grey Towers, Winchester, England, or Dr. Albert Dollory, his cousin, both of whom left England in 1891, will communicate with Fisher, Sands & Co., solicitors, Long Street, Melbourne, they may hear of something to their advantage. Anyone giving information as to their whereabouts will be rewarded."

it seems, died last year, and, as I expected, he cut me off without even the proverbial shilling. But my old uncle, my mother's brother, William Seaforth, who was as mad as a hatter, but a right good sort at heart, died three months ago and left a will leaving his pile to either myself or his other nephew, Dr. Albert Dollory, provided that one of us came to claim it before the 4th of November this year. If neither of us turned up at the office in Lincoln's Inn by that date, the money was to go to St. Thomas's Hospital. You see, no one knew whether either of us

was alive, because Dollory left home about the same time as myself. Now the will goes on to say that whichever of us two gets home first and satisfies the lawyers as to his claim, he is to have the money—a biggish sum, something like seventy thousand pounds, they say."

"By Jove! it is a big thing," I said. "How about the other man?"

"Dollory turned up yesterday," said Wilmot, shrugging his shoulders. "Just my luck! I saw Fisher this morning, and he told me that Dollory had seen the advertisement and had come to know all about it."

"Have you seen him yet, yourself?" asked Martin.

"No, but he is in town somewhere, and I suppose will come home by the *North Star*, too."

"Then it is to be a race?" I said.

"I hope not. I think we shall have to come to some terms and divide the spoil. I have wired to the wife to say I am going home, and to keep up her heart till I return; but, by Jove! if Dollory won't come to terms it will be a queer sort of business, eh?"

"It will, indeed," I said.

"If I fail, I am absolutely ruined," he went on. "I have drawn my last cheque and have borrowed money to get my passage home—first class, too, for I thought I was certain to get the fortune, and felt sure I should have the start of Dollory, until Fisher's news this morning. Now the aspect of affairs is altogether changed, and my last chance is the hope that he will not come home by the *North Star*. If he does not he must be out of it, as the next boat home, the *Tunis*, an Orient liner, does not leave Melbourne for five days; thus I shall have five clear days' start of him. But he is certain to go by the *North Star*. I wish my uncle had had the sense to make a decent will, but he always was a crank."

As Wilmot spoke he knocked the ashes out of his pipe savagely and began cutting black Nail Rod for a refill. Martin and I glanced at each other, and for a moment we did not speak; then Martin, who was chewing the end of his cigar nonchalantly, bent across and said—

"Look here, Hal, you had better come on board to-night, and we will have a look at the passenger list and see if Dollory's name is in it. Do you happen to know anything about him? have you ever seen him?"

"I have never seen him, but I have heard of him. I heard something two years ago quite sufficient to make me think that he would not show his face in Australia again. They hang murderers in the Colonies, as well as at home, you know."

Martin whistled and looked hard at Wilmot.



"May I introduce you to my cousin?"

"What do you mean, Hal?" he said.

"It is an ugly business. Even a black fellow is a human being. They say he flogged one of his blacks to death, and the poor fellow's wife, who was looking on, went mad and died. She was just about to have her first baby, and the baby died, too. Wholesale murder, I call it."

I could not help shuddering.

"Such a fellow belongs to the scum of the earth," continued Wilmot; "and I say, frankly, the more I think of his running a race with me for this property the less I like it."

"He will do you if he can," I could not help saying.

"Aye, that's just it; he will if he can. I must be even with him, and armed at every point."

"What is his business?" said Martin suddenly.

"Well, you see, he studied for the medical, and considers himself qualified, but I do not think he does much in that way. He has been about everywhere, travelling around the East. He was in the bush for a time, but



"A bright
eyed woman
was seen ap-
proaching."

after the affair of the black fellow he had to hook it. I am told that he has lately been at Singapore, Hong Kong, Colombo, Port Said, always moving about. Last year I heard that he was in Port Said, and had some medical appointment at the hospital there; but I think they found out what sort of man he was, and then I believe he took to dealing in precious stones. Anyway, he is not the kind who is likely to make a concession easy or to accept any terms."

Martin rose.

"Bring your luggage and come straight on board now," he said.

"Yes, you had better do that," I added; "I shall be as anxious as you to see if Dollory's name is on the passenger list."

Wilmot went to his room, and Martin and I waited in the hall for him. In a few moments we all started for the quay and went on board. I rang the bell for the chief steward and told him to bring me the passenger list. We glanced anxiously down it. Yes, there was the name, almost last on the list, and out of alphabetical order, showing that the man had only just booked his passage. There was the name—Dr. Albert Dollory, and underneath it Mrs. Dollory.

"Married!" cried Wilmot, with a start. "I never knew it. I am sorry for the wife."

"Perhaps it will be all the better for you," was my answer.

He turned away, looking sadly crest-fallen, and I went off to attend to other duties. I was too busy for the next twenty-four hours to give any thought to Wilmot and his affairs, and it was not until the next evening that I first saw Dr. Albert Dollory. He and Wilmot were standing together, smoking and talking earnestly. When the latter saw me he called out—

"Hullo, is that you, Conway? May I introduce you to my cousin, Dr. Albert Dollory?"

Dollory immediately shook hands, favouring me with a very sharp glance as he did so. At a first glance I thought him a rather handsome fellow. He was of powerful build and great stature, his features were dark and his black beard abundant. But a second glance showed me a deep scar across the forehead, which not only marred his beauty, but gave him a sinister aspect. Notwithstanding this defect, however, the man had a natural grace and decorum of manner which stamped him as one of gentle birth.

"Mr. Conway knows all about our queer position, Dollory," continued Wilmot. "The ship's doctor, Martin, is an old friend of mine. I met him and Mr. Conway last night at the Caulfield Hotel and we talked the thing through."

Dollory slightly raised his brows, but made no reply. I gave him another glance.

"You will forgive my interfering in this matter," I said, "but I earnestly hope you will both arrange to divide your luck."

"Thank you," answered Dollory, "but we have decided nothing as yet."

There was a supercilious tone in his voice, and he half turned on his heel. He evidently did resent my interference, but anxiety for Wilmot prompted me to say something more.

"As you will both arrive in England on the same day, surely that is the easiest and best solution of the difficulty, and 'half a loaf is better than no bread.'"

"I cannot agree with you," replied Dollory then. "For my part, I am quite content to abide by the terms of my uncle's will. As to you, Wilmot, you will be forced to do likewise, for I shall not consent to a division. We shall have a race home; there is nothing like a little excitement."

Half an hour afterwards Wilmot approached my side.

"I have failed to make any terms with my cousin," he said.

"Keep up your heart," I answered; "the lawyers will in all probability insist upon a division."

"Yes, if we arrive at the same time," was the reply. As he spoke he gave a harsh laugh. "Dollory said just after you left, 'There's never any knowing what accident may happen.' Then he stared me full in the face and continued, 'For my part, I think it would be very lame fun to fly a flag of truce when the chances of victory are so equal.'

"I wonder what he means?" I said.

Before Wilmot could reply a little round-faced, bright-eyed woman was seen approaching. She came straight up to Wilmot.

"Do you know where my husband is?" she asked. "I want to speak to him about something of importance."

"I left Dollory on the hurricane deck," replied Wilmot. "Pray, before you go, Mrs. Dollory, let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Conway."

Mrs. Dollory gave a quick glance into my face, as if she meant to read me through. She was a fresh-coloured, healthy-looking young woman of about two-and-thirty; her lips were firmly set, and her dark-brown eyes clear and honest in expression; but just for a moment I thought I saw a curious sort of veiled anxiety lurk in their depths. This may have been my fancy, for the queer position made me inclined to be suspicious about everything. The next moment her merry and ringing laugh dissipated my fears.

"Ah," she said, "what an adventure we are likely to have! But it is very nice to meet you, Dudley. I am, of course, deeply interested in this strange will; but rest

assured of one thing—I am determined there shall be fair play."

She nodded to Wilmot in a cheery manner and went off in search of Dollory.

"How nice she is!" he said, glancing at me. "I have taken an immense fancy to her."

"I like her appearance infinitely better than that of her husband," I said. "I do not take to your cousin, Wilmot. I hope you don't think me rude for saying so?"

"Rude?" answered Wilmot. "I hate the fellow; he is a blackleg, if ever there was one! I pity that poor little woman. I wonder what induced her to marry him?"

For the next few days I did not see very much of the Dollorys; then, one afternoon, as I was talking to Wilmot, Mrs. Dollory suddenly came up and spoke to us. She said nothing in particular, and I cannot recall very much about the conversation; but when she had gone I turned and looked at Wilmot.

"What a change!" I said. "I should scarcely know her face."

In truth it was considerably altered; the round cheeks seemed to have fallen in, and most of the bright, healthy colour had vanished. The dark eyes seemed to have sunk into the head, and now the veiled anxiety could be no longer hidden; it had given place to a look almost of terror.

"What has come to the woman?" said Wilmot.

"She is completely altered," I said; "but it may be owing to sea-sickness; most of the passengers are bad for a day or two after we first sail."

"No, it is not that," said Wilmot—"I mean, it is more. There is something queer about her. She was happy enough when we came on board, and now she looks truly wretched. I wish to goodness I was safe in England. The more I see of Dollory the more I dislike him. To be his wife must be no joke; I can scarcely wonder that the poor little thing looks bad."

"Have you come to any sort of terms?" I asked.

"About the money? No; he is as obstinate as a mule. I am no coward, Conway, but frankly I don't believe he would be above playing me a nasty trick if he could."

"Too risky," I said, "seeing that Martin and I know your position. If anything happened to you, there would be too much motive to make things go easy for him."

"Well, at least, one thing is certain—he

would stick at nothing, and I shall watch him closely. If we both get safe to London at the same time, there is no doubt, I suppose, that the lawyers will insist on a division of the property."

"I should say none whatever," was my reply.

"That is some sort of comfort." Wilmot sighed as he spoke ; then he added, "I wish I could get that poor little woman's face out of my head ; I cannot bear to meet that queer expression in her eyes."

"She is afraid about something," I replied ; "and doubtless Dollory has terrified her."

"By a scheme for my undoing," said Wilmot.

"We must hope for the best, Wilmot, and both watch Dollory as closely as possible."

The voyage flew by. We had a pleasant set of passengers on the whole, and many amusements were organised.

After the first day or two, during which her cheerful presence had been much appreciated by the other ladies, Mrs. Dollory kept very much to herself. She spoke little to anyone except her husband, and was evidently uneasy in the presence of Wilmot, Martin, and myself.

Just about this time I began to notice that Dollory became great friends with a young sailor on board, one of the white crew. He was a nice, easy-going, happy-go-lucky sort of a lad of the name of Philbeach. Dollory was often seen talking to him, and once as the young quartermaster turned away I distinctly saw Dollory put his hand into his pocket and thrust something into the young fellow's palm. The lad grasped it, flushed up brightly, and a moment afterwards turned aside. I went up to Dollory.

"I saw you giving a tip to Philbeach just now," I said ; "perhaps you are not aware that it is against the rules to tip the sailors—at any rate, until the voyage is over."

He stared at me and drew himself up.

"On my part, I was unaware," he said, "that I was answerable to you for my conduct, Mr. Conway. If I choose to be generous, it is, I presume, my own business." He paused for a moment, then he continued in a gentler tone, "I am interested in Philbeach. He has a sick mother and a couple of sisters. I have started a collection on the quiet for his benefit, and was just giving him a sovereign to add to the fund. But there," he continued, the purple flush rising again to his swarthy face, "I refuse to discuss this matter any further."

He walked away in the direction of the

companion, where he called down to his wife—

"Alice, I want you. Why don't you come on deck ?"

"Coming, Albert," was her quick reply. She came racing up the companion and joined him. He laid his hand heavily on her shoulder and they walked away by themselves in the direction of the engine-house.

Meanwhile Martin and I kept a sharp lookout. I had now not the slightest doubt that the man meant mischief, but I did not think that, with all his cleverness, he would find it possible to carry any sinister design into effect. He was very careful, too, and was on the whole rather a favourite with the rest of the passengers. He was a good *raconteur*, and had a fund of excellent stories to tell, which kept the smoking-room in roars of laughter. He was also particularly attentive to the ladies on board.

Day by day, however, the change for the worse in his wife became more apparent ; she was getting thinner and thinner. I noticed that she scarcely touched her meals, that she avoided meeting other people's eyes, and whenever her husband spoke to her she started and trembled. There was not the slightest doubt that a terrible fear was weighing on her spirits. What could it be ? Were we really on the eve of a tragedy ? I hoped not, but it behoved those of us who were in the secret to guard Wilmot with all the skill at our command.

It was, I remember, one night in the Red Sea, and we were all somewhat run down by the extreme heat, when I noticed Wilmot and Mrs. Dollory standing alone by the wheel. They were talking earnestly together. In a few moments Mrs. Dollory went down the companion, but Wilmot remained where he was, leaning over the taffrail and looking out at our long white wake. He was evidently in deep thought, for he did not turn round at my approaching footsteps, and I had to touch him more than once on the shoulder before he looked up.

"You seem quite bowed down about something, my dear fellow," I said. "Any news ? Any fresh developments ?"

The puzzled and worn expression of his face did not vanish at my words. He was silent for a moment, then he said in a low voice—

"Aye, and queer ones, too. There is some deep game going on ; I want your advice very badly."

"What has Mrs. Dollory been saying to you ?" I asked.

"I have not the slightest idea what she means, but she came to me just now; there were tears in her eyes; she implored me most passionately to leave the ship at Port Said."

"To leave the ship at Port Said?" I answered. "Why, my dear Wilmot, this looks as if she were in league with her husband."

"You would think so at the first glance, but I don't believe so for a moment. That little woman is true, or there is no truth on earth. She is desperately unhappy and said that she was risking a great deal in speaking to me at all, but she felt she must. You may be sure I stared at her in amazement and asked her to explain herself. She did not answer directly, but then she said that if I did not take her advice I should lose the legacy. She also implored me in pity to her to say nothing of this to her husband. 'I risk much,' she said, 'much more than you imagine, in trying to save you, but I cannot see all your hopes dashed to the ground. You are a good man and he—' She did not add any more, but the look on her face was enough. We heard you approaching and she went away. It looks pretty black, don't you think?'

"I hardly know what to think," I replied; "but as to taking her advice, that is out of the question. Your leaving the vessel at Port Said would be sheer madness. Beyond

doubt, Dollory wants you to do so in order to get to England first himself, and has probably, although you do not agree with me, made use of his wife as a cat's-paw. Just be watchful and careful, Wilmot, and stick to your post. I shall keep my eyes open, too; but as to the Port Said idea, put it out of your head once for all. It is a vile place, and full of scoundrels. You are perfectly safe on board the *North Star*, whatever villainy Dollory may be up to."

"All right; I am glad I have spoken to you, and I quite agree with you," he answered. "I'll do what you wish, but I long for the whole thing to be over, one way or another. I am getting sick of all this mystery and worry. By the way, have you noticed how thick Dollory is with that young sailor Phil-beach? What do you make of that?"

"Nothing. My dear fellow, you are oversuspicious. Go and turn in and sleep if you can. It is more than I shall do tonight. They tell me the thermometer is 120° in the stoke-hole."



"Put his hand into his pocket and thrust something into the young fellow's palm."

We arrived at Port Said on the 7th of October, and, according to my usual habit in connection with this port, I stayed on board. Dollory, however, and several other members of the party went ashore, but Wilmot, taking my advice, did not leave the ship. We were due to leave again at midday, and as the hour approached all the passengers came flocking back. Wilmot and I were on deck, and watched them streaming up the gangway laden with their different purchases. We

were just about to start—in fact, the gangway was already up—when Mrs. Dollory came hurrying towards us. She had not landed at Port Said, and looked now full of intense excitement. Her face was ashy white, and there was a wild, startled look in her eyes; her breath was coming quickly in uncontrollable agitation.

"My husband!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Conway, have you seen him? Has he come on board? I cannot find him anywhere. Surely he cannot be left behind. Oh, why are we starting without him? what shall I do if he is left behind?" An agonised look crossed her face.

"I really don't know anything about your husband, Mrs. Dollory," I replied. "I certainly did not see him come on board with the others, but I will make inquiries at once."

We were already rapidly leaving the shore. Wilmot and I hurried down the companion to the saloon. There I saw the chief steward.

"Do you happen to know if Dr. Dollory has come on board?" I said.

"I cannot tell you, sir," was his reply, "but I will make inquiries at once, and let you know." He left us and gave his orders to another steward to search the place. Just at that moment I happened to glance into Wilmot's face. I saw there a curious expression of surprise and ill-concealed delight. He would not meet my eyes, and turned away to hide his emotion. I laid my hand on his arm.

"What is up?" I said.

"By Jove!" he cried, "if Dollory has missed the boat he is done for—I am bound to be home first." His lips trembled and he dashed his hand across his forehead, for in his intense excitement the drops of perspiration stood out on it like beads.

"Yes, I am bound to be home first," he repeated.

"You certainly are," I answered; "but come to my cabin—I do not understand this business."

I took him away with me, being anxious to avoid meeting Mrs. Dollory just then. The moment we entered he sank down on my bunk, then started up as if unable to contain himself.

"You can never guess what it means," he said, "the intense relief from the most overpowering anxiety and fear. If Dollory has missed the boat I am a made man."

"I would not buoy myself up with too much hope," I answered, "your cousin is the last man on earth to do an idiotic thing of that kind; but we will be sure one way or

the other when the steward brings the report."

In about half an hour Mallinson, the steward, entered the cabin.

"Dr. Dollory is not on board, sir," he said; "the whole ship has been searched. He must have been left behind at Port Said. He was on shore there, it is certain, for Philbeach, one of the quartermasters, was with him and had a drink with him."

"I must go and tell Mrs. Dollory at once," I said. I left my cabin without glancing at Wilmot and met the doctor's wife coming down the companion. She was evidently looking for me.

"Yes, Mr. Conway, I have heard," she said; "my husband is not on board. Things are as I feared; but do not question me, I won't be questioned." She spoke in a broken voice, her head slightly bowed. Before I could answer her she had passed me on her way to her cabin. In some surprise, and with a vague feeling of unaccountable alarm, I went in search of Philbeach. He was busy attending to some of his duties and looked up when I approached.

"How is it, Philbeach," I said, "that Dr. Dollory has not returned to the ship?"

"I don't know, sir," was his reply. "He gave me a drink on shore, and said he would be back in good time."

"Are you hiding anything?" I said sternly. "Is anything the matter?"

Philbeach drew himself up and looked me full in the face.

"Certainly there is nothing the matter, sir," was his reply. "The doctor is a good friend to me. He takes an interest in my home affairs; he is one of the best men I ever met."

"Aye, so you think," was my innermost thought. I went back to my own cabin, where I was joined by Wilmot and Martin. I told Martin the state of affairs.

"Well, this is about the queerest thing I ever heard in my life," was his response.

"I can make nothing of it," I said.

Wilmot now interrupted us with a harsh, excited, jubilant laugh.

"I don't see anything so marvellous in it, after all," he said. "The very cleverest man may sometimes make a slip. Dollory miscalculated the time, or, perhaps—who can tell?—he got into some den of thieves in that horrid place. Anyhow, one thing is plain, he has lost and I have won."

"Time will prove," I answered.

"But it is all as clear as daylight," he continued, speaking impulsively. "I cannot



"I saw a yellow flag—the flag of quarantine!"

make out why you and Martin look so sober. By no possibility can the man be home in time."

"I don't like Mrs. Dollory's face," was my reply. "I never saw any woman look more scared."

"Aye," responded the doctor; "but perhaps she, too, was playing a part. You said she tried to persuade you to go ashore at Port Said, Wilmot?"

"She certainly did," he answered; "but there, whatever she said to me, I trust that woman."

"You can never trust appearances in a case of this sort," said the doctor. "She is, in all probability, her husband's tool, and, whether she likes it or not, was urged to make a victim of you. Had you taken her advice you would now have been a lost man, and she is doubtless in her present distress because she sees that her husband's game is up."

Wilmot rubbed his hands joyfully.

"I wish I could communicate this good news to my own little wife," he said. "Yes, I am made, and just when I almost feared that all was lost. I feel as lighthearted as a sandboy; a load has been lifted from my mind."

Wilmot presently left us and the doctor and I found ourselves alone. We looked one at the other.

"It seems incredible that Dollory should have missed the boat," I repeated. "What can possibly have detained him at Port Said, when such important issues are at stake?"

"That is more than I can tell," was Martin's reply. "The whole thing is a puzzle; but I own I am right glad. Of course, Dollory has outwitted himself in some manner unknown to us, and my friend Wilmot is safe to win."

We talked a little further over the matter and then we turned to our respective duties.

The days flew by without incident, but one circumstance was remarked on by several of the passengers. Mrs. Dollory refused to leave her cabin or to see anyone. Her meals were brought to her there, and no information whatever could be gained about her. Martin inquired once or twice if she were ill, but the stewardess invariably replied in the negative. It was quite useless, therefore, to expect any explanation from her. There was nothing whatever to be done but to give up for the present further speculation on this queer matter. Wilmot told me that he intended to disembark at Brindisi, which

place we should reach in two days, and then go straight overland to London.

"I feel as right as nails," he said. "I shall get the money and post back to join the wife by the earliest boat I can get."

He looked so radiant that the old proverb about the cup and the lip returned to my mind. A queer depression was over me which I could not account for, but I forbore to say anything to damp Wilmot's spirits.

At last the day dawned when we entered the harbour at Brindisi. Wilmot was early on deck; his face was lit up with a smile.

"I have just finished packing and everything is ready," he said. "How glad I shall be to be off! This suspense is almost past bearing."

The words had scarcely passed his lips before, to my amazement, I saw the chief officer tearing up the companion stairs, followed immediately by Dr. Martin. Martin was in such a frantic hurry that he cannoned against me and then flew past us both without speaking.

"Hullo! What's up, Martin?" I cried. But the men had disappeared into the captain's cabin in a flash.

The next moment the engine-bells rang and the throb of the screw ceased. We were still a good two miles from the shore. To stop abruptly like this was certainly most unusual.

"What can it mean?" said Wilmot.

"We will go forward and find out," was my answer.

We sauntered across the deck. The next instant I saw something that sent a sudden thrill of fear through me. At the main-mast, hauling a line, hand over hand, was the quartermaster, and above us, fluttering up higher and higher, I saw a yellow flag—*the flag of quarantine!* I gazed at it without speaking till it reached the top of the mast. Wilmot looked at it, too; then he said—

"What does it mean, Conway? What are they hoisting a yellow flag for?"

"It means that we are quarantined," I replied, and I ran to the captain's cabin. The chief officer and Dr. Martin were there.

"Come in, Conway," cried the skipper the moment he saw me. "I have just sent for you. Here's a pretty mess! There is a case of bubonic plague on board; no passengers can land here."

"Is it one of the passengers?" I asked.

"No; one of the men," said Martin—"young Philbeach. I cannot make it out at all, unless he got it at Aden; but if he had, he would have shown symptoms before now."

My heart sank at his words, and the outline of a consummately planned plot began to take shape. Dollory had been curiously friendly with Philbeach ; they had been together at Port Said.

"If he contracted it at Port Said——?" I queried.

"Ah!" replied Martin. "In that case he would be ill about now."

Without uttering another word I hurried back to Wilmot, who had remained where I had left him. I don't think he had yet taken in the situation, but the news had spread like wildfire through the ship, and there was something very like a panic beginning already among the passengers.

"There is a case of plague on board," I said to him. "I am sorry to tell you you cannot go ashore here ; you will have to come round to Plymouth with us."

He started back.

"Plague?" he echoed. "What an awful thing! But why may I not land? Surely the sooner I get away the better?"

"It is against the laws of quarantine," I answered. "You must stay where you are. I am very sorry, Wilmot, but there is no possible help for it."

I saw that he was trying to keep up his courage, and that even yet the worst had not dawned upon him.

"We are due at Plymouth on the 28th," he said, looking full at me with starting eyes. "I shall still be in time."

"The law is that we must be five days in quarantine," I replied.

He remained silent for a moment.

"Even so," he said then. "That will bring us to the second of November—a narrow shave. But even then I shall not be too late, unless, indeed, Dollory comes on and gets home first. Could he do that by coming on in another boat, I wonder? This is most infernal luck!"

I did not dare to communicate my suspicions to him yet, and went quickly back to the captain.

"Do you know, sir," I said, "if any boat left Port Said soon after us?"

"Yes," he replied—"the *Evening Star*, one of our boats on the Indian Line ; she is just behind us." He shaded his eyes and looked out to sea. "That is she coming up now," he continued. "But why do you ask?"

"I will tell you, sir, in a moment," I answered.

I ran down the companion and went at once to Mrs. Dollory. I knocked at the door of her cabin. A voice inside called out—

"Who is there?"

"It is I—Conway," I replied. "I must speak to you at once."

"Come in," she answered ; "I will see you."

I entered. Mrs. Dollory was standing in the middle of the cabin. She was staring straight at the door, and her eyes had a glassy appearance. Her face was so ashy white that it almost resembled that of a dead woman—the most horrible fear had spread over each feature.

"What is the matter?" I could not help exclaiming. "You look most fearfully ill. What is wrong, Mrs. Dollory? For Heaven's sake unburden yourself!"

The expression on the poor woman's face had made me for the moment almost forget the yellow flag and the downfall of all Wilmot's hopes.

"What is the matter?" I said again.

She shook her head, and her lips formed a voiceless word which I could not catch.

"Have you heard the bad news?" I said then.

She gave a violent start, clenched her hands, and at last found words.

"News?" she cried with a stifled scream ; "this is no news to me. Yes, Mr. Conway, I will speak. I have borne much from my husband, but this is beyond endurance. Will that poor fellow die? Does Mr. Martin think he will die?"

"I do not know ; I have not asked him," I replied. "I am thinking of Wilmot. This quarantine business will make him late ; he will lose the property. What does it all mean?"

"It was planned," she replied ; "the quarantine was planned in order to detain him."

"What do you mean?" I said. My heart gave a sudden clutch at the thought of the villainy which was about to be exposed.

She clasped her hands excitedly together.

"Oh, if only Mr. Wilmot had taken my advice, and gone ashore at Port Said, all would have been well," she continued ; "and I risked so much to tell him. He did not believe me, and he would not go, and I could not explain matters. Oh! I am a most wretched woman!"

"Do you say this thing has been planned?" I asked.

"Deliberately, devilishly planned by my husband," was her solemn answer. "Though I am his wife, I will bear testimony against him. I have suffered and borne much, but this I cannot and will not endure."

She shivered all over.

"Mrs. Dollory," I said, "if you are to do any good at all in this business, please understand there is not a moment to lose."

"What do you mean? Is the poor fellow really dying?"

"I know nothing about that, but I do know this—we shall be in quarantine for five days, and your husband, beyond doubt, is coming on in the *Evening Star*, which will pass us in a few moments."

She shivered again.

"He would kill me if he knew what I am going to do; but life has become intolerable. And as to money—oh! how men sin for

when he said those extraordinary words, 'Then you will be late?'

"'No, I shall be in time,' he answered; 'I have planned it all. Wilmot is no match for me when it comes to a question of brains. I shall be home first,' and he rubbed his hands excitedly.

"'If I succeed I shall not return to the ship,' he said. 'If I do not return, you will know that my plan has been crowned with success.'

"Oh, Mr. Conway, you can little guess my anguish when he did not come back; but what has happened I cannot tell you, although I can partly guess. When a man is a medical man, and also a devil, what awful ends can he not achieve? But will you not ask the poor fellow himself? Perhaps he will tell you the truth."

"I will see him at once," I said. "If he knows that you have told us so much, he may be induced to tell the rest. Perhaps you will come, too, Mrs. Dollory?"

"I do not fear infection," she said; "all I desire and want is to have that wicked man, my husband, punished for his awful crimes."

She followed me out of her cabin. We found

Martin with Captain Meadows; they both decided to come with us to visit the sick man.

I need not describe here the horrible symptoms of his disease. He was in great suffering and in mortal danger, but he was not unconscious. He looked at us all with lack-lustre eyes when we entered his cabin, but when he saw Mrs. Dollory they began to dilate with that curious expression of fear which all those who came in contact with Dollory himself seemed to acquire.

"What is wrong?" he said in a low whisper.

The little woman bent over him.

"I mean to nurse you, Philbeach, and bring you back to health," she said, "but I want you now to tell us the truth. I am Dr. Dollory's wife, and I command you in his name, if necessary, to tell the truth."

"Of course I will tell you," said the poor fellow. "I went ashore with Dr. Dollory.



"The little woman bent over him."

money, and how little it is worth after all!"

"Go on," I said.

She pressed both her hands to her eyes, and then continued, with less excitement in her manner—

"You know what a curious friendship sprang up between my husband and that poor young quartermaster Philbeach. I heard Dr. Dollory propose to him to come on shore at Port Said, but for what purpose I know not. I only know that he told me that if he could succeed in a certain line of action which he had marked out for himself, he would not return to the ship. I replied,

It was for a purpose. He said he was a great man at tattooing, and had discovered a new and wonderful ink. I had always wanted to have an anchor tattooed on my arm, the same as Joe the boatswain, and he offered to do it for me if I went ashore with him. We went to a little hotel and he did it in a private room. See, that is where he did it. He gave me five pounds afterwards. I don't know why, but he told me that he was about to come in for a large property, and thought it might be of use to me. See my arm, where he did it ; it hurts so dreadfully. Why should it hurt like that, doctor ? "

"Great God ! " cried Martin, "is it here ? "

"Yes, where it has swollen."

The doctor's face turned ashy white.

"Dollory gave him the plague," he whispered to me. "That very place is the pustule, the typical pustule, there can be no doubt about it."

"You are prepared to swear this, Philbeach ?" I said. "Martin, for Heaven's sake take down his affidavit."

Martin did so. The captain and I hastened on deck. The *Evening Star* was now rapidly nearing us. Even at the distance which separated the two big liners I could see the figure of Albert Dollory standing alone on the deck right up in the bows ; he was eagerly gazing in our direction. Just then I heard Wilmot's step behind me.

"Good God ! Conway, I am done for," he said ; "I am ruined, utterly ruined. Did you see Dollory on board the *Evening Star* ? He will land at Brindisi and be in London in forty-eight hours."

"No, he won't ; leave things to me," I answered. "I will explain later on."

The captain and I now hurried towards the gangway ; the company's launch was alongside, and the agent was standing at the bottom of the steps. Captain Meadows wrote a few hasty words on a piece of paper and thrust it into the agent's hands.

"Go full steam to the *Evening Star*," he said, "and give that to Captain Baker. It is a matter of life and death. I will

signal to stop her before she gets to the quay."

In an instant the launch swung off, and, getting up full steam, tore after the *Evening Star*. At our signal she suddenly stopped, and the launch went alongside.

"What did you write ?" I asked of the captain.

"This," he replied. "I have asked the captain to send Dollory back here at once. He is *our* passenger and must answer this charge to *me*."

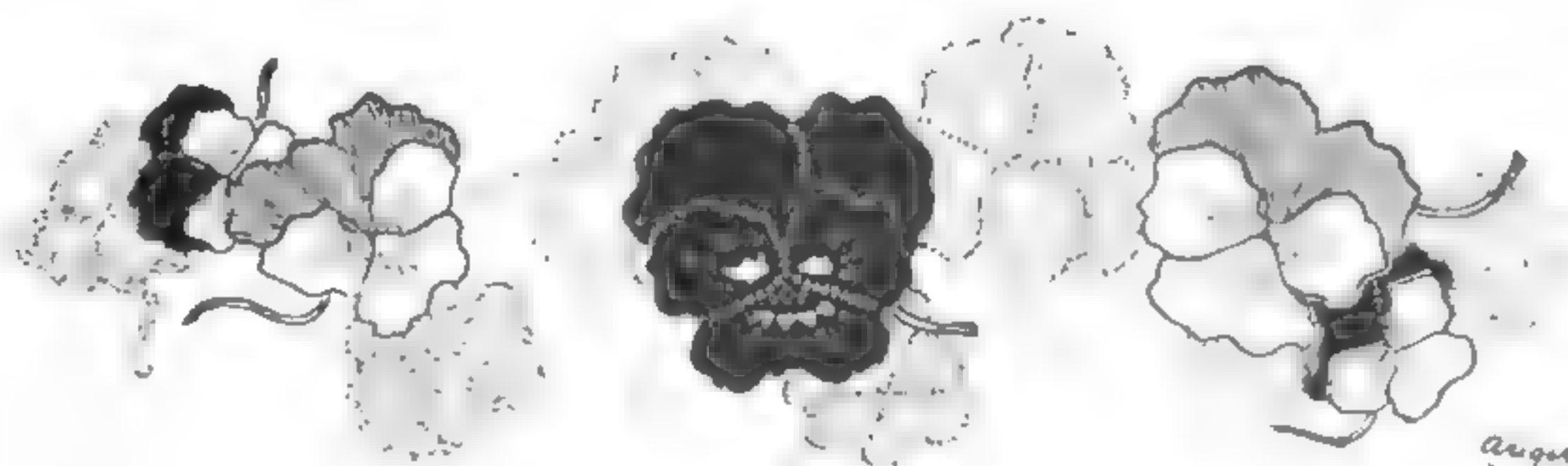
In less than a quarter of an hour the launch was back again, bringing Dr. Albert Dollory. He was in irons. From this we knew that, mad with fear and a guilty conscience, he had offered resistance on board the *Evening Star*.

I shall never to my dying day forget the scene that followed. When he discovered that his own wife had laid information against him, his rage and passion knew no bounds. Perceiving that all was up, however, he confessed what he had done, but without a spark of regret.

"Had I succeeded," he said, "I should have considered myself the luckiest dog on the wide earth ; as it is—" he turned his head aside.

The rest of this story can be told very briefly. Owing to the care and watchfulness which Mrs. Dollory herself expended on him, and to Martin's unceasing ministrations, Philbeach recovered ; but, as if there were indeed in this life some even-handed justice that makes the criminal fall into the pit he has dug for another, the only other person on board the *North Star* who caught the plague was Albert Dollory himself. Of course everything that could be done was tried to save him, but he died before we reached Gibraltar. I don't believe anyone on board mourned his loss.

We were quarantined at Plymouth, but Wilmot was, after all, just in time to receive his fortune. Although he denied it, I am almost certain that a share of that fortune went to Mrs. Dollory, whom her brutal husband had left penniless.



STORIES OF THE GOLD STAR LINE.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.

Illustrated by ADOLF THIEDE.

NO. VI.—THE SACRED CHANK.



All the men I ever met in my long cosmopolitan acquaintance, Michael Quentin was the one who for many years puzzled me most. He was a middle-aged man, interesting to talk to, and extremely well informed. He had a high forehead and a somewhat long and narrow face, his eyes were watchful and keen, with a dare-devil gleam in them at

times, but more often they wore an indolent and even sleepy expression. He was a man possessed of much tact, and it was evidently his rôle to do kindnesses and make friends.

In consequence, he was popular, and most people spoke of him as a right good fellow. He and I had been many voyages together in the *North Star*, and I never knew whether I was glad or sorry to see his name on our passenger list. The man was a constant puzzle to me, repelling and attracting me alternately. About himself he was singularly reserved. He had constant business in Colombo, and occasionally he went with us as far as Sydney, but he spoke little or nothing about why he took these voyages or visited these distant lands. On one occasion, it is true, he told me that he was a confidential agent of many of the largest European dealers

in Oriental treasures—as he spoke he led the way to his cabin, and we spent an interesting hour examining his spoils and curios.

Amongst these were to be seen ivory carvings, precious stones, rare coins, odd musical instruments, and even weapons of war for savage tribes.

"Do you spend all your time over this kind of thing?" I could not help asking.

"Oh, I have many strings to my bow," was his ambiguous answer, and glancing up I caught an expression in his eyes which for the moment startled me. There was a keen and almost bloodthirsty gleam in them. I decided on that occasion that I did not like Quentin, but the next time I had an opportunity of talking with him his fascination drew me once more, and often when he was not on board I found myself thinking of him.

It was late in the autumn of 1897 that I was destined to lift the veil from this curious personality and to discover the man as he really was. The circumstances which led me to a ghastly conclusion began in an apparently ordinary way. I was spending a week in London before starting on one of my usual voyages to Sydney. One afternoon it occurred to me to call on an old friend. This friend was no less a person than Professor Birchell, the great conchologist. Some years ago I had done him a small service and he had often asked me to visit him. I knew that Birchell was a man of slender means, but he had a mania for collecting shells, and his collection was, he told me, one of the finest in Europe. I now drove to his house in a hansom, and on my inquiring if the Professor were in, the servant replied in the affirmative. I entered a dark and dingy hall, and the next moment was shown into a fair-sized room packed with small tables upon which stood various glass-covered specimen cases which I saw at a glance contained shells in countless variety.

Birchell was standing at the further end of the room, his black velvet skull cap on his head. He was engaged in earnest conversa-

tion with someone. In the half light I did not see who it was, but as I approached nearer, to my astonishment I recognised Michael Quentin.

"Ah, Conway," said Birchell, when he caught sight of me, "I am glad to see you. So at long last you have redeemed your promise. Quentin, let me introduce you to my friend Mr. Conway."

"Conway and I have met before," said Quentin, with that almost furtive smile which distorted rather than improved his face. He held out his hand to me. Birchell glanced from one of us to the other.

"It is a bit of luck, your dropping in just now, Conway," he said. "Had I known your address I should have written to you before. It lies in your power to do me a service."

"You may be sure if I can I will," I answered.

"It is this. The *North Star* sails in a week's time, does she not?"

"Next Thursday," I answered.

"My granddaughter, Lucy Borrodale, is one of the passengers. She is travelling alone, and I have just asked Quentin to look after her a bit, which he gladly promises to do, but if the ship's purser will also show her attention I shall not have an anxious moment with regard to her."

"I will do what I can for Miss Borrodale," was my reply. "But is it possible, Quentin," I added, turning to the other man, "that you are coming out again to Sydney?"

"Only to Colombo, this time," was his reply; "I have some special business there which will not take very long. In all probability I shall be coming back with you on your return trip."

"And I earnestly hope that Lucy will also be coming back on the return trip," said the old man. "I can ill spare her, and the expense of keeping her at Colombo will be considerable. Well, it does cheer me to know that you will both look after her." He rubbed his hands as he spoke.

"Has Miss Borrodale friends in Colombo?" I asked after a pause.

"I can say 'Yes' and 'No' to that, Mr. Conway," was Birchell's reply. "Old friends of her mother's will in all probability give Lucy a welcome. She bears a letter of introduction to them, but she is going out on important business, very important business." He glanced, as he spoke, at Quentin. On Quentin's lips again broke that disagreeable smile, and the watchful gleam in his eyes was very marked.

"As Quentin knows all about it, and as you and he are friends, and as I want you to be good to my girl, I have a great mind to confide in you, Mr. Conway," said old Birchell. "Eh, Quentin? what do you think?"

Quentin did not speak at all for a moment, then he said slowly—

"I naturally can have no objection. Yes; I think, on the whole, it would be well that Mr. Conway should know."

"Sit down, then, Conway," said Birchell, "and I will explain matters as briefly as I can."

He cleared a chair of a glass case and I dropped into it. He himself took a chair opposite to me. Quentin remained standing.

"Did you ever, Conway," said my host, "happen to hear of the great Kalkana Chank?"

"The what?" I cried.

"The great Turbinella Fusus, with the dextral helix, that was stolen from the Temple at Kalkana in India fifteen years ago?"

"Never," I answered; "your words are so much Greek to me."

"Then I will explain. The Turbinella is a certain kind of shell found by divers off the Andaman Islands. All these shells have a certain twist or spiral, generally from left to right, called a sinistral helix. Large shells, however, with the dextral helix—that is, from right to left—are very rare and therefore very valuable. The few that have been found are used in Hindoo temples by the priests to offer up incense to their idols. They are considered sacred and are called Chanks. Now in the end of the last century an enormous Chank was found, nearly twelve inches long. This was sold to the Nizam at Kalkana for half a lac of rupees—that is, five thousand pounds. Now to turn to the personal part of my narrative. I had one daughter—she was twice married. When very young she married a Mr. Harrison, a clerk in a City office, who died leaving her with one son, and a few years later she made a match which in point of position was considered good. Her husband was a Mr. Borrodale, who was at the time of the marriage English Resident at Kalkana. Immediately after the wedding he and she went out to Kalkana. There a daughter was born to them, the Lucy Borrodale who is to accompany you on your next voyage. My daughter inherited my mania for collecting shells. The shells you see around you have been largely collected by

her. The great Chank was at that time in the Temple at Kalkana, and she wanted it, as it was the most unique specimen in the world. What the true story is has never been revealed, but the fact remains that the Chank disappeared. Suspicion pointed to my daughter, and the Nizam made a great fuss. Borrodale and his wife were obliged to leave Kalkana, and it was then proved that she had it in her possession. But before she arrived in England the shell was again stolen—by whom was never known.

"Very soon after the theft Borrodale, through a series of misadventures, lost his money and died a poor man. His wife did not long survive him, and Lucy came to live with me. In Borrodale's will the rupees which the Nizam was to restore if ever the Chank was returned have been left to Lucy and her heirs, but were Lucy to die without children the money will become the property of my daughter's eldest son Walter. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly," I answered. "It is an extra-



"Tea is not quite ready yet, grandfather," she said."

From that day to this the mystery remains unexplained; but one thing is certain, the Chank was never brought back to Kalkana.

"Just at the time of the theft the Nizam badly wanted funds, and Borrodale was an extremely rich man. In order to avoid open scandal Borrodale lent him four lacs of rupees, the Nizam at the same time giving him his bond that whenever the shell was restored the money should be returned. Borrodale was forced to be satisfied with this bond, which was duly attested, and which the present Nizam has since declared he is willing to meet whenever the shell is brought back to his sacred Temple at Kalkana by one of the family.

ordinary story, but your statement is abundantly clear."

"Well, I have more to say. Pray listen. For years we have heard nothing of the Chank, but within the last fortnight an extraordinary thing has happened. I had a cablegram from a man at Colombo, a pearl dealer, a Parsee of high renown of the name of Bahajee. We have long corresponded, and I believe him, for an Oriental, to be a very straightforward, upright sort of man. From time to time he has sent me valuable shells and I have never known him play me false in any way. The cablegram which I received from him was to state that news of the shell had reached his ears, and he begged me not

to lose an hour in coming to Colombo. I was much startled by this information and spoke of the matter to Lucy and Walter. Walter could not leave his employment in the City, and I am far too infirm to undertake such a long trip. Lucy, who is a very plucky girl, determined to take the matter into her own hands. I raised some of my last capital for the purpose, and she has taken her passage on board the *North Star* and goes out with you next Thursday. Should the Chank be recovered she will have a fortune of about thirty thousand pounds."

"By Jove!" I exclaimed, "it is a big business."

"It certainly is; but, nevertheless, I am nervous at Lucy leaving me. She is young and knows little of the world. If her mother's friends, the Challoners, are still at Colombo they will doubtless advise her to the best of their ability; but if not——"

"Have you cabled to find out if they are still there?" I asked.

"No, Mr. Conway," answered the old man; "cables are expensive things, and whether the Challoners are at Colombo or not Lucy must go. Failing them she will put up at the Oriental Hotel, and I have told her to take Bahajee into her confidence. It will undoubtedly be to his interest to recover the Chank for her, for I have promised him a large sum if he carries the matter satisfactorily through."

"Well, Mr. Birchell," I answered, "I am obliged for your confidence, and you may be quite sure I will do what I can for your granddaughter."

"And I also will do my best for Miss Borrodale," said Quentin.

The old collector gripped us both by the hands.

"I know you will," he answered; "I trust you both. This is a lucky call of yours, Conway, for I feel that with two such champions my grandchild will be safe. But come into the next room; I should like to introduce you to her."

Old Birchell preceded us to the door, threw it open, and took us into a smaller apartment at the other side of the hall. This room was also shabby and painfully bare. The curtains to the windows were faded nearly white, and the pattern had long been worn off the carpet, but all the same the room had a clean, habitable, and almost homely look.

As we entered, a thin girl in a shabby black frock was standing by the fire. She turned on hearing our footsteps and put

down a brass kettle which she was holding in her hand.

"Tea is not quite ready yet, grandfather," she said, looking at the old man.

"All right, Lucy," he answered; "plenty of time. I have brought two visitors to see you—they will be your companions on the voyage. Let me introduce them—Mr. George Conway, purser on the *North Star*. Make great friends with Mr. Conway, Lucy; he is a capital fellow, I know him well; and"—here he glanced at Quentin—"Mr. Michael Quentin."

The wrinkled old face peered anxiously up into Quentin's as the quavering voice made this latter introduction.

"Both these gentlemen know all about your mission to Colombo, Lucy, so you can freely confide in them," said Birchell; "and now tea, my dear."

The girl, having briefly replied to her grandfather's introductions, returned to her office of tea-making. Her movements were quiet and deliberate, and I thought I noticed even then a watchful expression in her young face. Certainly care, and care alone, had brought that deep furrow between her pretty eyebrows, and there were lines round the somewhat sad mouth which seemed to me infinitely pathetic. Had she been well fed and well dressed she might have been a pretty girl, for her eyes were large and of a soft grey colour; but her face was too pale and her cheeks too hollow to make her in the least beautiful now.

She had just poured out three cups of tea when I heard the click in the hall door latch, and at the same time I noticed a rosy colour fly into Miss Borrodale's pale cheeks.

"What can be the matter now?" I thought, my interest keenly aroused.

"Ah!" said the old man, an annoyed expression visiting his face, "what brings Walter back so early?"

He had scarcely said the words before the door was noisily opened and a young man of about eight-and-twenty came in.

"Hullo!" he cried on catching sight of Quentin, "you here? This is luck. I thought you might be looking in this afternoon and I got off an hour earlier on purpose. A cup of tea, please, Lucy. How close the room is! Why do you keep such big fires?"

"Grandfather is cold, and the room must be kept warm on his account, Walter," said the girl in a grave tone.

"Walter," said the old man, "let me introduce you to my friend Mr. Conway."

Harrison glanced at me, something like a scowl between his brows. He favoured me with a brief nod and then sat down on the sofa near Quentin. He began to talk to Quentin in a low tone, and the older man bent forward and replied in monosyllables. Walter Harrison's appearance by no means prepossessed me. He had loose, full lips and a shifty expression in his eyes. I thought that his whole appearance bore marks of a dissipated career.

Having drunk off my cup of tea I rose to depart.

"Trust me to look after your interests on board the *North Star*, Miss Borrodale," was my final remark. She looked me full in the face and a smile flitted across hers. She had a charming smile, sympathetic and tender.

"Ah, that's right, Conway," said the old man. "The knowledge that you will look after the child lifts a load from my mind. Thank you. God bless you!"

I left the house; but, during the remainder of that day, Lucy Borrodale's face, her old grandfather's anxiety, the peculiar expression which Michael Quentin had worn, returned to me again and again. How strange was the quest on which this young girl was going! What did it all mean? What was to be the upshot of this adventure? Above all, what sort of man was Harrison, and why did he hurry home in order to have a special word with Quentin? I had left Quentin behind when I took my departure.

After summing up all the different points of the story which I had just participated in, I came to the conclusion that I distrusted Walter Harrison and that I had seldom seen a more disagreeable face.

The next few days flew on the wings of time, and on Thursday morning Miss Borrodale came on board the *North Star*. Quentin had already arrived. When I came on deck I saw him talking to her. Old Birchell had not accompanied his granddaughter, but Harrison was seeing his sister off.

"Good luck to you, Lucy!" were his last words. "Get the Nizam to haul out the rupees and come back a rich woman." He gave her a leer, rather than a smile, and then called Quentin to accompany him to the gangway. They whispered together for a moment, the bell rang for all who were not passengers to return to the shore, and soon we were steaming away.

The voyage flew by without adventure, and Miss Borrodale and I became great friends. She soon lost her shyness with me and chatted

eagerly about her grandfather and her home life.

"He is dreadfully poor, Mr. Conway," she said on one occasion. "He wants all the ordinary comforts of life. He is always denying himself for my sake. I have begged and implored of him many times to let me earn money, but he won't hear of it. He keeps on denying himself and selling his valuable shells from time to time. I know, as a matter of fact, that he sold some most unique specimens in order to provide money for this trip; but never mind, if I am successful he shall have them all back again. And I will be successful," she added, with an emphatic movement which sat prettily upon her. "I vow and declare that I won't come back to grandfather without the Chank."

"That is a somewhat rash vow to make," I answered. "Have you ever realised the difficulties of the quest on which you are going?"

"Oh, yes, but I also know that I have indomitable perseverance and determination, and that I do not think, brought face to face with danger, that I should know fear."

"I am glad to hear it," I answered; "such a spirit ought to lead to success. When you recover the Chank you will be a rich woman."

"Yes," she answered; "and I repeat again that I won't come back to grandfather without it."

Although Miss Borrodale made friends with me, I observed that she avoided Quentin. He was inclined to make himself agreeable to her, but his smartest anecdotes and his raciest stories never provoked a smile on her grave face. When he approached she invariably went away, not being exactly rude to him, but always very cold and distant. One day, as we were approaching Colombo, he spoke to me about it.

"What is the matter with Miss Borrodale?" he said; "anyone would think that she distrusted me."

"That surely is impossible," I answered; "she scarcely knows you."

"That is quite true; she does not know me at all," answered Quentin; "but, all the same, she may need my help at Colombo, and it is silly of her to be so cold and distant."

I myself began also to think that Miss Borrodale was scarcely acting wisely, and the day before we reached Colombo I spoke to her on the subject.

"Why do you always avoid Quentin?" I asked.

She started as I spoke, then said quietly —

"Because I heartily distrust him."

"But have you any reason for this remarkable avowal?" I continued.

"Partly a woman's intuition," was her reply, "and partly because he is a great friend of my stepbrother, Walter Harrison."

"Ah! you have never spoken of your brother," I said.

"My stepbrother, Mr. Conway." She hesitated, then continued in a low voice, "It is dreadful to speak against one's own flesh and blood, but Walter has been the curse of my grandfather's life and mine. He is a bad man. I don't know how my mother came by such a son; but ah! she did wrong herself, dreadfully wrong, when she stole the

or less since that day a week before we sailed. I fear I don't know what, but of one thing I am determined, I will never give any confidences to Michael Quentin."

"Well, I am certain you exaggerate matters," I answered. "It seems a pity that you should not avail yourself of Mr. Quentin's services. He knows Colombo well. If your friends are there, well and good; but suppose they are not? You will then be thrown solely and entirely on your own resources."

"No, my grandfather's old friend Bahajee, the Parsee dealer, will help me. Anyhow, Mr. Conway, I repeat what I have just said—I will never confide in Mr. Quentin."

We arrived at Colombo, and there, to my distress and Miss Borrodale's own consternation, found that the Challoners had gone up country six months ago.

"What is to be done?" I said to her. At her request I had come on shore and we were having tiffin together at the Oriental Hotel.

"I shall stay here," was her quiet reply; "I shall be quite safe. Bahajee will advise me, and I shall be busy taking steps to recover the Chank."

"All the same, I don't like leaving you in Colombo alone," I said.

"Oh, I shall be all right," she answered, "and too busy even to have time for fear. What could harm me?"

"If I could only feel that you and Quentin were friends, and that I left you more or less in his hands—" I replied.

"Then I am very glad you are not leaving me in his hands, Mr. Conway, for then I might have real cause for alarm."

"Well," I said, as I took her hand, "I am sorry I must go now; but send me a letter—will you?—to Batavia; I shall pick it up on my return voyage. Who knows?—by then you may have been successful; but, whatever



"I leapt into the jinrikshaw and sped rapidly into the town."

Chank. Why did she do it? Even if we never recover the rupees, that Chank ought to be restored to the Nizam; it seems the only way of retrieving my mother's character. But to return to Walter—he is unprincipled, he drinks, he is a bad man, I hate and fear him."

"This is terrible," I said.

"Listen, Mr. Conway," continued the girl. She laid her hand for a moment on my arm. "If the Chank is recovered, and if the Nizam is true to his bond, and if I die, Walter will come in for the money, thirty thousand pounds. Mr. Quentin knows the whole story of the Chank—Walter and Mr. Quentin have been together more

happens, write to me. I shall come to see you here the moment we touch Colombo again."

She thanked me heartily for this, promised to do what I wished, and I left her. She came to the door of the big hotel to see me off, and smiled as I went rapidly down the street. To all appearance she looked in the best of spirits, but I greatly disliked leaving her—her quest was a dangerous one, and she might be surrounded by those who would rob her of her rights. Still, she was a brave and sensible girl, and knew well how to take care of herself, and I thought that even in the event of an emergency she would know how to act.

The ship sailed from Colombo and we went south. We reached Sydney in good time, and on our return voyage I looked anxiously forward to our arrival at Batavia and to the letter which I expected to find there. I called immediately at our agents' office and asked if there were any letters for me. One was placed in my hands. It was from Miss Borrodale. I tore it open and read the following contents—

"DEAR MR. CONWAY,—Things are going well at last, and I hope by the time you arrive here I shall have been successful. Mr. Bahajee, my grandfather's old agent, has proved very kind and is moving heaven and earth to help me in my search. The cue about which he cabled to grandfather came, unfortunately, to nothing, and beyond the fact that the Chank has lately been in Colombo he had at first nothing to tell me definitely; but within the last few days a most important new development has taken place. Bahajee has told me that he believes he is at last really on the track. It seems that the shell was traced to the possession of an old merchant here, an American who lived alone and has lately died. Fearing that the emissaries of the Nizam would find and steal the Chank, he buried it in some place in the Cinnamon Gardens—at least, that is the story. The secret of its hiding-place has, to all appearance, died with the old merchant; but a Cingalese, a friend of Bahajee's, told him only yesterday that the merchant had a mania on the subject, and was constantly repeating the secret of the hiding-place to himself. He lived alone, with only one companion, a large grey parrot. The Cingalese swears that the bird picked up the words of his master's secret and used to repeat them at intervals, amusing the old man by dinnig the secret into his ears at all sorts of unexpected moments;

but since the merchant's death the bird has not once uttered the words, although the Cingalese is persuaded that they form part of his vocabulary. Bahajee believes that some means can be taken to induce the bird to repeat the secret, and is now arranging that he and I shall go the old merchant's house for the purpose. This is a little difficult to manage, as the relations of the old man guard his property day and night, and are naturally anxious to discover the hiding-place of the Chank for themselves, as it is worth money to anyone who finds it. They therefore watch the bird day and night, fearing to leave it a moment with strangers, and trusting to induce it to reveal its secret. Bahajee intends to outwit or to buy it off these people. What his exact mode of action is I cannot tell you, for I do not quite know; but he has every hope that he will succeed, and whatever he wishes me to do I intend to undertake. You know how I vowed that I would not return to grandfather without the Chank or the rupees, and I would go far now to keep that promise which I made to my own mind. By the time you reach Colombo I hope that success will have crowned our efforts. In the meantime wish me luck. Yours sincerely,

"LUCY BORRODALE.

"P.S.—Mr. Quentin is still in Colombo; I met him only yesterday. He asked me how I was progressing with my search, but I told him nothing. I dislike and distrust him more than ever."

I read Miss Borrodale's letter over more than once. There was something about its contents that I did not like. The story of the parrot seemed to me queer and unlikely, and a horrible suspicion assailed me that Lucy was being led into some trap. The more I thought over matters the more uncomfortable did I grow. But there was nothing for it but to wait until I arrived in Colombo again.

At last, just at sunset one glorious evening, we reached Ceylon. I had told the skipper that I intended going immediately on shore, as I had important business to transact. He raised no objection, and I had scarcely set foot on the landing-stage before a Cingalese boy came up and handed me a note.

"Mr. Conway, sahib, from Mr. Bahajee. Jinrickshaw ready here for you, sir," he said.

I read the contents of the note quickly.

"Come to my house at once," wrote Bahajee; "there is trouble."

My heart sank and a vague fear clutched at it. I leapt into the jinrickshaw, and the runner darted out from among the carriages and sped rapidly into the town. In ten minutes I had arrived at the Parsee's house, and one of the servants received me. He led me at once through the verandah into a room almost dark, except for a small lamp which stood on a table. The dim light revealed a low couch upon which lay Bahajee. I had seen him last just before we started for Colombo, and was now startled at the change in his appearance. The dusky skin was drawn tightly over his emaciated face, the cheekbones had started into undue prominence, and the glassy, black eyes shone like lamps.

The moment he saw me he made an effort to rise, but fell back again with a cry.

"You have come, Mr. Conway," he said ; "stoop down, I have something to tell you."

I bent down over his couch.

"Yes, Bahajee," I said ; "speak. If you have anything to say, tell it quickly."

His eyes rolled anxiously round the apartment.

"There is no one present," I said ; "say what you have to say at once."

"I will," he answered ; "but there is a cloud over me—I am near death. My brain cannot think. Yes, now I remember—it is the English mees—she is in danger."

"What? How? What do you mean?" I interrupted.

"There is a plot to kill her," continued the old man. "I blame myself. I was tempted, and I helped to throw dust in her eyes. You may be in time to save her."

"You must tell me more, Bahajee, and quickly," I said. "Do you mean to imply that Miss Borrodale's life is in danger—in danger now?"

"Yes, now," he answered, "now. Perhaps this very minute. I counted the days until you returned. I thought your ship would be due to-night. I sent my messenger to ask you to come here. The English mees is good—she saved my little grandson, Bahajee the younger. Three days ago the child sickened with fever, and I thought him dying, but the young English mees came and nursed him all night; she saved his life. Then I vowed she should not be a victim. I cannot tell you much more; only go and save her."

"And you were in this plot?" I cried.

"I was bribed," he answered feebly, and beginning to whimper; "yes, bribed—a large

sum. But I am dying now; he cannot hurt me."

"Whom do you mean?"

"I name no names," said the old Parsee ; "but—but the English mees will never get the sacred Chank—never—and *her life is in danger*. Go to the house with the parrot. The parrot knows nothing, it is all a plot to throw dust in her eyes. Go at once!"

"But where is the house?" I asked, my anxiety and perplexity rising to fever heat ; "tell me at once."

The dying man gave a weird and crooked smile.

"The jinrickshaw boy will tell you; he will take you there. Say Bahajee bids—he will do my bidding. There is a revolver on that table—put it in your pocket. Go; you may be in time."

Without another word I seized the revolver and left him. His eyes, with that queer, dying gleam in them, followed me to the door of the room. I closed it behind me, rushed out, jumped into the jinrickshaw, and told the boy to take me to the house where the grey parrot was.

The lad started running as fast as ever he could. We seemed to fly through the streets. I soon saw that he was taking me in the direction of the native quarter. Presently we entered a road lined with palms; we alighted under the shadow of one, and, the boy still accompanying me, we made our way rapidly up a short entrance drive to what looked like a large private mansion. Without uttering a word the boy knocked on the front door. It was immediately opened by a wizened-faced old Cingalese woman. She had toothless gums, and looked at us both with apprehension, but before she could bar the way I had entered.

"I have reason to believe that the English lady Miss Borrodale is here," I said. "Take me to her immediately."

She smiled, shook her head, and pointed outside.

"No English mees here," she said.

"You lie, you old hag," I answered : "take me to her at once." As I spoke I took the revolver from my pocket. My action was significant, and the wretched creature fell back in terror against the wall.

"Tell her," I said, turning to the boy, "that unless she obeys and takes me to Miss Borrodale at once, I will shoot her."

The lad with a grimace translated my words into Cingalese. He evidently added to them, for the woman no longer resisted, but turning, led the way down a long corridor

and, pointing solemnly to a closed door, disappeared down another passage to the left.

" You must come with me," I said to the boy, " and if necessary you must help me. I will guarantee that you do not suffer for your actions."

The lad looked up at me with sparkling, soft, dark eyes, and as I entered the room followed me without a word. He and I now found ourselves on the threshold of a large apartment. At my first glance it seemed to be empty ; then I saw a sight which I shall never forget to my dying day. In the faint

Lucy Borrodale was standing at attention. She had not taken the slightest notice of my abrupt entrance, every faculty of her mind was intently occupied in watching the parrot. Would it reveal its secret, or would it remain obstinately silent ?

I went quickly over to her and laid my hand on her shoulder.

" Miss Borrodale," I said, " I have come to fetch you. Thank God I am in time ! you must come with me immediately."

" No, no," she said in a voice of distress ; " why have you come to interrupt me ? The parrot was just going to speak - I won't stir



gleam of a distant shaded lamp I perceived the figure of Miss Borrodale. She was standing in a listening attitude close to a table upon which stood a large cage containing a handsome West African grey parrot with a beautiful crimson tail. The bird was lazily rubbing its beak against the wooden perch of its cage ; now and then it fluttered its wings as if it meant to speak and then changed its mind. Crouching on his knees within a foot of the girl, and smoking an opium pipe, was a hideous-looking Cingalese—the fumes of the opium were entering the bird's cage.

until it gives up its secret. Don't interrupt me, please ; go, do go."

" You must come away at once," I said authoritatively ; " the parrot knows no secret — it is all a blind — a blind ; you must come away."

As I said the words the Cingalese rose, laid down his pipe, and approached my side. As he did so I saw him steal his hand into his belt, and in another instant his dagger would have been through my heart. But I was too quick for him. With a sudden movement I pinned his hands behind him and held him tight.

"Go out of this, Miss Borrodale," I shouted. "Go at once; I will be with you when I have settled this chap."

Brave as she was, a frightened look came into her eyes.

"But I cannot leave you like this," she said.

"Go! go!" I shouted.

She saw by my manner that I meant what I said, and reluctantly left the room. The jinrickshaw boy was standing by the entrance.

"Take the lady straight back to the Oriental Hotel, and return for me," I said to him. He seized Lucy's hand and ran with her out of the room.

"Now, you old villain," I said, turning to the Cingalese, "what do you mean by this?"

"Let me go," he whimpered.

"Not until you go on your knees and confess. What were you doing with the English lady?"

"Nothing."

"I have a revolver with me and will shoot you dead on the spot if you do not confess immediately. If you tell me the truth I will spare your miserable life."

He looked me full in the face, saw that I was desperate, and went on his knees.

"I was paid to do it," he said. "She was meant to spend the night here. When the fumes of the opium made her sleepy I was to—" He made a significant gesture.

"And who put you up to this?" I said.

But before he could reply, almost before the words had passed my lips, there was a noise outside—it startled me, the Cingalese took advantage of the sudden loosening of my hands, made a deft movement, wrenched himself from my grasp, and fled from the room. Fortunately in his own terror he left the door open behind him. I went into the passage and the next instant had left the house. I went straight to the Oriental Hotel, where Miss Borrodale was. I found her in a state of extreme nervous tension.

"Why did you come?" she said; "why did you interrupt? I cannot imagine what this all means—the parrot would have told me his secret. He was fluttering his wings and going on just as he always did before he spoke. And Bahajee was ill and could not come with me, and I was too impatient to wait any longer. I wanted to secure the Chank and return home in the *North Star* with you. I insisted on going alone this evening to the house where the parrot was kept. Bahajee was queer and tried to prevent me, but I would not listen to him. I paid that

old Cingalese to smoke the opium pipe as the merchant who died so often did. I hoped the fumes of the opium and the old associations would induce the parrot to tell his secret. He was getting accustomed to me, and he would assuredly have soon spoken; but now you have spoiled everything, Mr. Conway, and I cannot forgive you." The tears sprang to the angry girl's eyes.

"Listen to me," I said. "I went to seek you at the house with the parrot by Bahajee's desire."

"Bahajee's desire? What do you mean?"

"What I say. A letter from him was awaiting me when I landed this evening. The old man was dying and told me everything."

I then related the story which the dying Parsee had whispered in my ear.

"The parrot was a blind," I said in conclusion; "the whole scheme was concocted—by whom, God only knows! But one thing is certain, had I not appeared in time, you would never have left that place alive."

She turned very white. For a time she was silent, then she said gravely—

"And I lost my temper and did not believe in your kindness. Will you forgive me?"

"There is nothing I would not forgive now that your life is saved," was my answer. "I can tell you, Miss Borrodale, I went through an ugly hour this evening—I should not care to live through it again."

She was leaning up against the wall of the private sitting-room which she occupied, and I saw her hands tremble and a dimness pass over her eyes. After a pause she said, "What shall I do now?"

"There is but one thing to be done," I answered; "you must come back to England with me."

"What! without the Chank?"

"It is my belief that you will never now get the Chank. I fancy you are right about Quentin, and if anyone has got it he has."

"Then I return to England a failure?"

"At any rate, you come back. Had our voyage been delayed, had I not known . . . Miss Borrodale, I shudder even now to think what your fate might have been."

"I suppose I was mad to go," answered the poor girl; "but you can never realise what it all meant. Bahajee assured me that the parrot knew the secret, and would tell it if only we could devise some means of recalling the past to its memory. Bahajee thought of the opium pipe and everything



Adolphe Théodore-J.-Thiebaud

"She was standing in a listening attitude close to a table."

was arranged. He and I were to go to the house this evening. But two nights ago the old dealer's little grandson got ill. I don't believe Bahajee loves any other creature on earth, but he was nearly mad about the little one. I know something of illness and I nursed the child, and I believe, with God's help, restored his health. Then, yesterday morning, Bahajee himself had a queer attack, a stroke or something, and when I saw him this morning he was too ill to come, and I found to my amazement that he had changed his mind and did not wish me to go either. That I would not consent to. I wanted the Chank, it seemed the last chance of finding it, and I wanted to give my grandfather comforts during the rest of his life."

"It was natural that you should go," I said; "but now I must leave you for a short time—I will be back again before long."

I went straight to the old dealer's house. I was anxious to force Bahajee to reveal the name of the man who had attempted Miss Borrodale's life, but I was too late. I was greeted by the news that Bahajee had breathed his last half an hour ago. I went into the bedroom and saw him. The jinrickshaw boy was there, and the little grandson, Bahajee the younger, sat on the old man's bed. He was playing with a toy which the English miss had given him, and looked bright and well, in startling contrast to the dead face which appeared more ghastly than ever in its last sleep.

After paying the jinrickshaw boy handsomely I left the house and returned to the hotel.

"Now," I said to Miss Borrodale, "I want you to do something for me."

"What is that?"

"I want you to come with me on board the *North Star* to-night."

"To-night?" she said.

"Yes; we sail before noon to-morrow; but I cannot rest until you are safe out of this place. You have to do with desperate people, and the Chank is of extreme value. Come, you will not be long putting your things together. I have a carriage outside."

She glanced at me in hesitation, then said abruptly—

"I believe you are right."

In less than half an hour Miss Borrodale had packed her things and we were whirling through the streets. When I lay down in my own cabin that night I had the satisfaction of knowing that she was safe on board the *North Star*. I was too excited to sleep, and although the life of the young English

girl was saved, an extraordinary and inexplicable depression still lay at my heart.

The next day, just before the ship sailed, Quentin came on board. I was standing not far from Miss Borrodale when he crossed the gangway. He looked up and saw us together. It needed but one glance into his face to know the truth. It turned an ugly grey, his lips trembled, he almost tottered, then, quickly recovering himself, he came forward.

"This is luck," he said. "I always felt you would return in the same boat with me, Miss Borrodale. How do you do? What about your search—have you been successful?"

She only replied to his words by the faintest inclination of her head. I glanced at her and saw that she was deadly pale.

"Miss Borrodale is not well," I said gravely.

My first inclination was to seize the man, shout his treachery into his ears, and ask the skipper to make him his prisoner and bring him safe to England; but on reflection I knew that I had no warrant for such a course, and the idea suddenly flashed through me that in all probability he had secured the Chank and was bringing it home. If so, it behoved me to be wary, for even yet Miss Borrodale might recover the treasure.

I went to my cabin and thought carefully over the position. We were already pursuing our homeward course. In a short time we would be back in England. Quentin had no idea that I suspected him. I resolved that, if possible, he should remain in ignorance of my true feelings. I went to see Miss Borrodale and told her what I wanted her to do.

"Stay in your cabin as much as possible," I said. "You hate the man, and I also thoroughly distrust him. There is no doubt he was at the bottom of the foul game to murder you which I was just in time to prevent. But now our object is to secure the Chank, which I firmly believe he has in his luggage. He would rather drop it in the sea than that it should get into your hands; but if possible we will outwit him."

"What do you mean to do? Why cannot you accuse him boldly?" said the girl.

"Because I have not a scrap of evidence," was my answer, "and the strongest suspicion goes for nothing without evidence. I am nearly convinced that he has the Chank. It is evident that it was to be found in Colombo, and a girl like yourself cannot outwit a man of Quentin's calibre."

She said nothing further, but a faint smile crossed her face. I went away to think out the problem of how I could possibly outwit Quentin. The man was clever ; he had perfect control of himself, and bore, as far as I could tell, an excellent character ; nevertheless, beyond doubt he was guilty, beyond doubt it had been at his instigation that the helpless girl, who was now accompanying us back to her native land, had been so nearly murdered. There was every reason to believe that the Chank was in his possession. How was it to pass into the hands of its rightful owner ?

Suddenly, one evening, an idea struck me which seemed little short of an inspiration. If it succeeded it would be a certain way out of the difficulty. By my scheme every piece of Quentin's luggage would be searched without his having the slightest suspicion of its being done with any but a natural object. Early on the voyage he had casually mentioned that he meant to disembark at Plymouth. As we drew near to Plymouth I went on deck, for I knew that I must act quickly when the moment came. We should stay there twenty-four hours before going on to London. As usual, Vernon, the harbour detective, came on board accompanied by another man. I went up to him at once.

"Look here," I said, "I want you to help me."

"Certainly, Mr. Conway," he replied.

"It is this," I continued. "I am not in a position to explain matters, but I want the luggage of every passenger who goes ashore to be searched at the Customs through and through."

"Contraband goods ?" he queried.

"You may put that interpretation upon it if you like," was my reply ; "but all I can say is this, that more important affairs depend on this matter than you can possibly guess. Can you help me ? Can you drop a word to the officials ?"

"I believe so," he answered slowly.

He went off and I told the skipper that I was going on shore in the tender with the

other passengers, as I had some private business to attend to. As I went towards the gangway, the tender being alongside, Quentin came up, holding out his hand.

"Good-bye, old chap," he said. "Pray offer my adieux to Miss Borrodale. This has been a bad business ; I hope she is not too bitterly disappointed."

"It is not good-bye, yet," I answered ; "I am coming ashore with you."

"Really," he replied ; "on business ?" The slightest, almost imperceptible expression of fear flitted across his face.



"He turned round and seized me by the arm."

"Yes," I answered. "Come, let us go—the tender is ready."

He made no further remark. We reached the wharf in a few minutes and stood watching the passengers' luggage as it was being removed to the Customs shed.

"Here comes mine," said Quentin. "I must go and see after it—good-bye."

"I am in no hurry," I said ; "I will come with you."

"Why ?" he asked, suddenly turning round upon me. There was a ring of insolence in his tone which did not escape my ears, and I caught Vernon's eye, who was

standing just behind me. My heart beat as without a word I followed him into the shed.

Quentin walked quickly up to where his luggage was piled on one of the long benches. An official came forward and I saw him dexterously slip a sovereign into the man's hand. The official flushed deeply as he caught sight of Vernon—he had evidently not seen him at first, and quickly handed the coin back to Quentin.

"I cannot take it, sir—it is against rules," he said in a low voice—then in a louder tone, "Have you anything to declare?"

"Yes," replied Quentin, laying his hand on a portmanteau, "there are two hundred cigars in that trunk."

The man unstrapped it and Quentin took the box out.

"There is nothing else," he continued. I glanced at his face. It was ashy white. I guessed by its expression that he knew I was watching him.

"We have orders to search all boxes, sir," said the man. "We suspect some lace, I think. Kindly unlock all your luggage."

Quentin glanced round. It was evident that all the boxes of the other passengers were being searched. There was no escape. In his eyes was the expression of a caged wild beast. Suddenly he turned round, seized me by the arm, and drew me aside. I felt his hand trembling.

"I want to speak to you for a moment," he said.

"What is it?" I asked.

"It is all up! My God! don't expose me. If you only knew! I was in terrible financial difficulties, and the temptation was too great, the bribe too big! I am ruined, utterly ruined!"

"Now, look here, Quentin," I said, "you have played as dastardly, as cowardly, as

dark a trick as man could play, but it is not my business to bring you to justice. If I did, I believe I could prove—"

"Don't! don't!" he said. He was shaking so violently that he had to lean against the wall of the shed to steady himself. The passengers began to look round.

"Give me the shell," I said in a whisper, "and you can go to the devil; only never let me see your face again."

He remained silent for a moment, then went up to where the official was examining his box. No contraband goods were to be found there, but in one large box, carefully packed in cotton wool, was the sacred Chank. Quentin handed it to me without a word, and the next instant I saw him leave the shed.

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What followed can be better imagined than described. I shall never forget Miss Borrodale's joy, nor the look of happiness on her young face. When last I heard of Birchell and his granddaughter they were people of means, and had moved into a large house, for the Chank had been returned to the Nizam, who had faithfully kept his bond and given back the rupees which Borrodale had

lent his father. Miss Borrodale is therefore a rich woman, but Quentin has disappeared from England; and as to Walter Harrison, that unhappy youth has gone from bad to worse, and was arrested a few months ago on a charge of forgery. He is now serving his time in one of her Majesty's prisons. When I returned from my last voyage I went to see Miss Borrodale.

"And I owe it all to you!" she said on this occasion. "How can I thank you?"

I thought there was a way which I would tell her later on, but for the time I was silent.



"'And I owe it all to you!'"